DAVID COPPERFIELD'S LIBRARY

JOHN BRETT LANGSTAFF

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S LIBRARY

MR. MICAWBER BRINGS DAVID COPPERFIELD TO THE HOUSE WHERE HIS OWN BOY'S BOOKS HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY A CHILDREN'S LIBRARY

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S LIBRARY

WITH PROLOGUE BY SIR OWEN SEAMAN
AND EPILOGUE BY ALFRED NOYES

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Lib. Sci.

BY

JOHN BRETT LANGSTAFF

A.B. *Harvard*; B.Litt. *Oxford*

FORMER HEAD OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE HOUSE AND PRESIDENT
OF THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES MOVEMENT

ILLUSTRATED BY RAVEN HILL, FRANK REYNOLDS
H. M. BATEMAN, ARTHUR NORRIS, AND
HANSLIP FLETCHER

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DEDICATED

UNDER THE SPECIAL

PATRONAGE OF THE BOY MARTYR

SAINT PANCRAS,

TO

JACK AND HARRY

AND TO THE

CHILDREN OF DAVID COPPERFIELD'S LIBRARY

IN MEMORY OF

CHARLES, SON OF JOHN DICKENS

The author pledges himself to devote any profits resulting from the sale of this book to the use of David Copperfield's Library.

PREFACE

I MUST be allowed a confidential chat with my reader before he plunges into the deep stream of this book's reading. I must be permitted to sit on the bank with him very informally for a few minutes and say here, in the warm sun of a moment's pause, what I shall not have breath to say once we have been caught by the irresistible current of enthusiasm that engulfed princes and poor men, lettered and unlearned, from many nations, until the theme of this story became a concrete fact in the establishment of a children's library in the boyhood of Charles Dickens.

The author of *A Story Teller, or Forty Years in London*, a delightful raconteur of amusing experiences, has referred to me in his book as "Young Mr. Brett Langstaff of Magdalen College House, Oakley Square". I think a letter would still be forwarded to me from that address, for it was as Head of that Oxford Mission that this adventure was started, but the appellation "young" may perplex the reader. Is he to call up the picture of the venerable Mr. Pett Ridge sweeping the manuscript with his long white beard as he pens these words concerning me, or is he to imagine me clinging to my high-chair and at the same time painfully forming the letters which have been

thought remarkable enough to publish? The reader knows Mr. Pett Ridge, and he knows that the prince of humorists is not old. Therefore I suspect he has already placed me, as he might have been credulous enough to place Daisy Ashford, among the children of David Copperfield's Library. From this enviable position I would prefer to tell you this story, for other than the boy spirit of Charles Dickens and friends of his own age, who are still to be found in Somers Town, who else is in a position to relate the tale as it happened?

Mr. Pett Ridge says on another page of these reminiscences he has recently given the world : " Of all the many London residences connected with the name of Dickens, the house in Johnson Street is the least engaging ". I remember when I first attempted to interest him, in what Kate Douglas Wiggin used to call " our adventure ", I suggested that in making a permanent provision for a boy and girl library in the very house where Charles Dickens had treasured his own boy's books we would be preserving a memory of the last of the Cockney slums. " If you realized ", he replied, " that I have spent a good part of my life trying to get rid of that slum, you would not ask me to help you preserve a memory of it ".

It is the mystery of how this " least engaging " of Dickens' residences succeeded with the help of the children in engaging the interest of the world that I have endeavoured to unfold in the following pages. For the Burgomaster of Leyden, representing the famous university of his city, made a

special pilgrimage, together with delegates from other cities of the Low Country, to present their Dutch children's books ; the French Ambassador, instructed by the Republic across the Channel, came in person, bringing a royal gift of juvenile literature that had been carefully selected by the Bibliothèque National in Paris ; and librarians from various parts of America arrived with gifts rich and rare, published for the children of the New World.

Mr. Pett Ridge concludes his chapter with references to the series of brilliant events which marked the growing interest in " our adventure ". The details of these events, which involve most of the leading literary and social figures in London at the time, have been recorded by me, but until I attain the age of Mr. Pett Ridge or the ability of Mrs. Asquith, who revived for us on one occasion the part of *The Silent Lady*, I hesitate to set them forth.

Among the many distinguished men and women to whom I am personally indebted for courtesies extended, let me recall Colonel and Mrs. Ralph Vivian, who started us off, and Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Tate, who saw us through. Chief and foremost, I would note that the name I was privileged to use before any committees or other supporters had been secured was that of a man for whom I have reason to feel the deepest personal affection, His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

There should follow here the names of those who came forward in an advisory capacity, a few of

whom joined us a little later than their mention at this point would seem to indicate. General Sir Robert Baden-Powell, Sir James Barrie, Sir Frank Benson, the Right Rev. C. H. Brent of Western New York, Dr. Robert Bridges, Lord Dunsany, Mr. John Galsworthy, who made the first subscription, if I remember rightly, and said almost the last word in our defence at the Mansion House, Mr. Edmund Gosse, Mr. Kenneth Grahame, Mr. Ben Greet, the Right Rev. William Lawrence of Massachusetts, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Mr. B. W. Matz, at that time President of the Dickens Fellowship, Miss Anne Carroll Moore, Sir Gilbert Parker, whose active interest was a great encouragement, the Right Rev. P. M. Rhinelander, then Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Rev. L. MacL. Watt of Edinburgh, Mr. H. G. Wells, and finally the late Kate Douglas Wiggin, whose way of referring to our effort on behalf of the children might have been given in gentle tribute as the title of this book.

To this formidable list of advisers, the American Ambassadors, at first Mr. Davis and then Mr. Harvey, the Marquess of Cambridge, eldest brother to Her Majesty, the Archbishop of York, who had once had the responsibility of Magdalen College House, the Archbishop of Wales, whose son had been a worker at the Mission, the Bishop of London, who added personally to our funds, and Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, son of Charles Dickens himself—all these worthy men serving as our Hon. Presidents stood ready to give what later turned out to be most valuable advice.

Finding the adventure well furnished with advisers and no one except myself to take their advice, I appealed to a few friends, who were as faithful and trusting as friends could be, to form an Executive Committee. Here again, as with the labourers in the vineyard, some came at one hour and some at another, but we cannot do less than give an equal credit to each. They were Mr. Archibald De Bear, Mrs. A. P. Brandt, Mrs. Curtis Brown, who served as Hon. Treasurer, Miss Gartside, Mrs. W. Ord Marshall, our Hon. Secretary, Mr. Thomas Miller, Grace Lady Newborough, Mrs. Reeves, at that time Mayoress of the borough in which our library stood, Mrs. Arthur Brooke, the late Mrs. Pye Smith, whose well-known philanthropic work was always accompanied with a spirit of rare genuineness, Mrs. Edwin Tate, whom I had the honour to precede as President, Mr. Reece Walker, chairman of the St. Pancras Library Committee, and Mrs. Wesley Watson. We called ourselves the Children's Libraries Movement, and secured the interest of Mr. Gerald Tunnicliffe, Mr. Frederick Dubois and Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan to keep us out of legal and financial complications.

The names of eminent guests who made historic, for a time at least, the public presentations of our adventure must remain hidden in the headlines of filed newspapers. The meeting in South Lodge, at which Mr. George Bernard Shaw made one of his most dramatic appearances, was by courtesy of Lady Llangattock, whom we created a Vice-

President by way of appreciation and added in the same rank the Duchess of Hamilton, the Viscountess Harcourt, Mrs. J. Lewis Griffiths and my mother, Mrs. J. Elliot Langstaff. The Devonshire House Play and Ball, to which Mr. Pett Ridge has also alluded, with the help of Nigel Playfair, revived the comedy Bulwer Lytton had written for Charles Dickens to produce seventy years before in the magnificent setting of its original production. But there were many other dinners and meetings, not to forget the unique *matinée*, when Mr. Ben Greet brought the famous *Poor Jo* before the footlights again after so many years of retirement. The names connected with these events connote very real personalities for me, and I shall never cease acknowledging a sincere and personal gratitude for all they did to aid our cause.

It seems only fair that fiction characters, whom I have followed through so many pages, should finally have tracked me to the little house in Johnson Street, but I trust that "Cordelia" and "Lemure" did not suspect that "the sound of scrubbing and splashing of water", referred to in *London Vignettes*, which they heard issuing from the copper in which Mrs. Cratchit boiled the celebrated Christmas pudding, was caused by my own "boiling clothes". They were the artist-smocks worn by the children of our Library. The boiling of these smocks, I might add, admitted of no fiction.

The most telling tribute which David Copper-

field's Library received was from the library profession itself, as represented officially by the librarians of France, England and America. There can be no more authoritative opinion of the value of our Library as it was established, and I trust will long continue, than that which comes from the superviser of the many elaborate children's libraries in New York, Miss Anne Carroll Moore. When she says: "Never before have I seen children touch library books with such love and respect", we "young" people of the Library remember, as we always had reason to do, the love with which publishers, illustrators and authors presented us with the best of their day's labour.

To quote from Miss Moore's *New Roads to Childhood*, "*The Play's the thing*, and carrying out the idea called for a creative conception of the whole nature of the work, dramatic presentation of it, and absolute faith in the children. I have seen millions of children reading in well-ordered libraries in poor neighbourhoods. I know something of the measure of their influence and the cost of sustaining it, but I have never been so profoundly moved as by what I saw and felt in David Copperfield's Library. The quest of beauty and romance still goes on in the streets of Somers Town. The children's ready response in giving their services to making and carrying on such a library there is in itself a proof of that. No one watching the face of one of those remarkable boys swinging far out to sea in a book of his own choice, or that of another, tearing the heart out of his

with the intensity of his reading, can have any doubt of it". When Miss Moore finally observes: "It is the *realist* children's library I have ever seen", she pays a tribute to the children which they alone are privileged to acknowledge.

Just at this moment a letter has been brought me from Miss Caroline M. Hewins, the pioneer of children's libraries in America, whose published account of our work in London is charmingly worded. She asks me to tell the story of our adventure to her people in Hartford, Connecticut, and making this my excuse, I leave my reader to plunge without me into the stream of this story along with David Copperfield and the other children of Somers Town.

J. BRETT LANGSTAFF

Stony Brook, Long Island,
New York.

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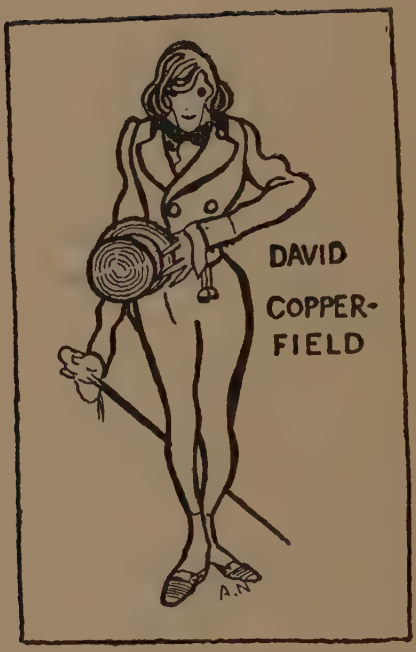
PROLOGUE

BY

SIR OWEN SEAMAN (Editor of *Punch*)

If our patrons are gentle of heart,
    If they take the attempt for the deed,
And excuse any flaw in our art
    For the sake of the Cause that we plead ;
When they see we have done what we could,
    Why, then, in their kindly esteem
At our best, we shall be very good,
    At our worst " not so bad as we seem."


DAVID
COPPER-
FIELD

David Copperfield's Library

CHAPTER I

THE MARK OF THE L.C.C.

It all happened in a house, a small house of pleasing proportions, built a little over a hundred years ago in a district which now remains as the last of those happy-go-lucky communities of city-born Englishmen that can claim title as being a Londoner's slum. With your permission we will leave the description of the house till later and ask you not to go searching the pages to discover if our promise will be kept. Enough to say the street which boasts this dwelling, together with many dwellings of similar appearance, is called after a forgotten Alderman of the distinguished name of Johnson, and further, the house has the fortune or misfortune of being identified with the number "13".

The hero of our tale, a slender boy in tight-fitting jacket and trousers, whose refined face looks out pathetically from beneath a white top-hat, enters this Johnson Street house in 1824 at the age of twelve. The age of twelve is the age with which any man's life normally begins. The day of a man's birth, with which so many biographers

have the bad taste to begin, is to be sure the day on which the subject enters the lives of other people, but it is my contention that he must live eleven years before he has the privilege of entering upon his own life. There is something about that year in his life when he first becomes spiritually separated from his parents and finds himself in the Temple listening to the wisdom of others and asking them questions. The boy to whom we refer here began a life that was to mean a continuous joy to thousands of readers, in a small chamber on the top floor at the back of the Johnson Street house.

In this little room, where the writer of these words has had the privilege of living himself for a considerable time, the young lad pondered over a meagre collection of books, added to in the course of his association with friends at school and elsewhere. Hither he returned daily, when at the age of fourteen the luxury of school had to be sacrificed for ever to more needy demands. In this sanctum he toiled over shorthand and the first principles of literary composition. But what is of far greater importance, from the window of this little room he must often have gazed out over the green fields which were being gradually encroached upon by the villas of Camden Town, past the heights of Hampstead and Highgate, into the blue distance from which fancy came to join with the hard facts of his boy-life in the dreams that finally found expression in *Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, David Copperfield* and the host of

other novels in which his early associations were so clearly portrayed.

For these reasons and many more this miniature mansion, with its child's collection of books set like a priceless jewel between its two front windows, claims the importance of having taken the boy author from the drudgery of factory life, seen him off to school and finally sheltered him during the first beginning of a literary career which was to prove an ageless service to humanity. To be sure in after years its literary child had so carefully disowned the shelter of his youth, had so successfully avoided any definite reference to his life in Johnson Street, that the house had become lost to even the keenest of his admirers. But just prior to the centenary of his birth, some kind friends had called forth the rate books whose memory of their victims is unfailing, had drawn on the remembrance of his surviving school associates, and by these means and others, known only to true politicians, had succeeded in so convincing the London County Council of the identity of the house as that of the author's boyhood, that that august body to whom the Londoner looks for permission to do things as the average child looks to a parent, deemed the house of sufficient importance to be worthy of the Council's recognition, and as one public person of importance might leave a card at the house of another public person of equal importance, the Council affixed a small tablet on the front of 13 Johnson Street, bearing its own three mystic and powerful letters and the name

of the famous author. The apology for this perhaps indiscreet enthusiasm was duly put on record under the plea that something ought to be done to mark the centenary of a man who had done so much to point out the attractions of the ancient metropolis. Further, the attention of rate-payers was called to the fact that the Council had suffered the demolition of all other houses of the author's boyhood. And finally, the studied neglect, which had reduced the neighbourhood to one of the most desolate slums under the Council's jurisdiction, was thought to be somewhat appeased by the beautiful simplicity of this tablet.

With such mark of recognition the little Johnson Street residence weathered the distressful period between the fourteenth and eighteenth years of the twentieth century, and since it had found it necessary in conformity with the restrictions of the time to "make do" with a pre-war coat of paint and a general lack of care, it arrived in the new post-war era with a decided feeling—alas, common to most of us—of having spent a good many more than five years fighting the Germans. Whereupon, the Council, having long before observed that the building was structurally dangerous, as well as unsanitary, for a second time gave the decree that it should be destroyed. Care would undoubtedly have been taken, however, to preserve the tablet and place it like a tombstone over the spot where the historic building had stood.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST LIBRARIAN

IT is a curious thing that when I first entered Somers Town I became instantly aware that people with whom I came in contact in clubs and on the street corners, men standing idly in their doorways or hawking their wares through the streets, old, bedridden women living on God knows what, and even the brave, healthy little children, who were evidently the first consideration of a most inconsiderate and unconsidered community, were the counter-types of characters which one had suspected as the exaggerations of Charles Dickens. The Fagins, the Wellers, the Little Dorrits, the Quilps—to start to recollect the various characters who have since become my valued friends and acquaintances, would be to name the entire cast of unfortunates or less-fortunates in the great play of humanity set forth in the novels of the beloved author. With an impression of such vividness being borne in upon me at the making of each new acquaintance, one can easily realize my joy on walking down Johnson Street, which was not my usual wont because of its character—to be more precise, because of the general filth and smell of the place—to discover on the small tablet, to which I have already referred as

affixed by the London County Council, the information that "Charles Dickens Lived Here as a Boy".

I did but glance at the house, for I was conscious that from the time I had entered the streets I had been observed from nearly every window, and remembering a warning that had come to me from those who professed to know, that it was no place to linger, I merely noted the charming proportions of the small Georgian residence. In a moment it flashed through my mind that this was really the shabby-genteel home of the Micawbers where the young Copperfield had been found lodging, and I longed to touch the old knocker in its round panel on the front door. It still preserved an air of shabby "genteelity" compared with the other houses in the street, which I confess gave me little confidence. As a famous wit who passed by the house with me some time later remarked: "Where the curtains are good, the house is bad". In that moment, however, a resolution, which was to cost me many months of labour and anxiety, was decided upon. The home where Charles Dickens treasured his boyhood library was to be the home of a library for other poor children of Somers Town in our day.

The life of Charles Dickens extended only fifty-eight years, and with the exception of excursions abroad, which to-day would not be counted as unusual, it was lived within a comparatively small area in the immediate neighbourhood of No. 13 Johnson Street. He was born on February 7,

1812 (the year of Napoleon's Russian disaster), and he died on June 9, 1870 (another disastrous year in the history of France), some few miles outside of London. But when he was still an infant he was brought to London, where with little interruption he practically completed his distinguished career before taking up his last residence in the house he had seen and longed for as a child, at Gadshill.

It was between the altar of St. Mary le Strand, where his father and mother received the Sacrament of the Church and its instruction regarding the procreation of children, and the site of a small suburban villa in Bayham Street, one might have found Charles Dickens almost any day of his life. There was the house in Chatham, which probably showed signs of the five years of his infancy spent there between the ages of four and nine, for he was a mischievous lad and full of pranks. There were also a few months of lodging in Lant Street in the Borough, and a few weeks, perhaps, somewhere in Hampstead, both just prior to the Johnson Street residence, but the roofs under which he developed through boyhood were practically all to have been found a century ago within a stone's throw of the present home of David Copperfield's Library.

The outline of his life in London is clear. In 1822, eighteen months before the final settlement at 13 Johnson Street, John Dickens, retiring from the dockyard at Chatham to a small house in Bayham Street, Camden Town, brings Charles with

the rest of a growing family, for he was eventually only one of eight children, into the neighbourhood of our Library. The pension on which the father had retired proved small as the family grew large, so finally Mrs. Dickens stirred herself, as mothers will do, to save the situation and with the hope that "family connections" might be depended upon, she moved her brood to Gower Street about nine months later, where she set up a school for young ladies. The brass plate on the front of the house filled her establishment with hopes, but not with young lady-boarders. The result of the speculation, after a few months' waiting, was overwhelming debt, which in those days compelled many a worthy person to retire to the Marshalsea Debtor's Prison. To this commodious asylum on the other side of the Thames the Dickens family adjourned and lived in security, which after all, must have had its quality of luxury. Personally the most complete sense of luxury I have ever experienced, was after having given myself over to the ranks of the English Army during the recent war. Clothes, meals, and the course of one's life entirely provided for, with complete protection from the outside world! It was in such security, at any rate, that Charles' family lived, while he was put to work, as is still the custom in the Johnson Street neighbourhood, to bring what he could to the family coffers.

John Dickens, before he encamped in the Marshalsea, had seen his son safely lodged at 35 Little College Street, and more than that, through

the influence of another relation, had found him a job in a blacking factory near where the Charing Cross Station now stands. It was not long before the young lad moved himself across the river from this lodging to Lant Street, his biographers say to be near the family prison, but I should suggest that since he described his guardian in Little College Street as the character of Mrs. Pipchin, his move was rather in the spirit of an escape. The proximity of the prison, however, did permit of his eating morning and night with the family.

Something in the shape of a legacy turned up for the family, and with all possible dignity they proceeded to take a house in Johnson Street, Somers Town. During the few weeks the house was being made ready they stopped in the neighbourhood at the same house in Little College Street where Charles had touched the lowest depths of misery, and also somewhere in the direction of Hampstead, for it is said the rest of the family found Mrs. Pipchin equally as uncongenial.

Why they chose the house in Johnson Street I do not know for certain. There is a tradition, whose source I mention elsewhere, that there was an aunt living at what is now No. 13. This may have meant a relation or merely an intimate friend. For whatever reason, less than nine months after leaving Bayham Street they took over this two-floored villa from Caroline Welden in the summer of 1824 and remained in possession except for some short interruption for almost five years. This placed them in a position where they could afford

to quarrel with their relation of the blacking factory, and the result was Charles was taken from his miserable sweat-shop and sent to the school in the Hampstead Road at the corner of Granby Street. In less than three years the correction of the Debtor's Prison was forgotten, and John Dickens' heart was hardened.

Among the laudable extravagances in which he indulged, was withdrawing his son from the useless school in the Hampstead Road and sending him to a Dr. Dawson, whose establishment in Compton Street had the advantage, as John Dickens would have seen it, of being in the more élite neighbourhood to the south of the Euston Road. But however laudable the expenditures may have been, they exceeded the income by the fatal sixpence and again brought misery to the family for a short time. On Lady Day 1827 he was summoned and evicted from the Johnson Street house, because of his failure to pay the rent and taxes, and by way of curtailing the family expenses, and at the same time preserving its dignity, he found lodgings in the more exclusive square to which Johnson Street is related.

The arrival of the Dickens family, as lodgers in No. 17 of those houses which stood together in the centre of Clarendon Square so that their fronts combined to present the shape of a polygon and their backs looked toward each other over little sheltered gardens, must have met with some objection from the householders, for it was the first instance of rooms being let in those houses known

as the Polygon. Whether the opposition of the Polygon colony prevailed, or whether it was a genuine homesickness on the part of the Dickens family, the next year the rent-collector was surprised to find that No. 13 Johnson Street, which for a few months since the Dickens' eviction had been in possession of one, Samuel Vernon, was once again in the possession of the late evicted tenants.

The family whom we found living in No. 13 perhaps throws some light on this method of "squatting". These people might easily have spent half their life in a debtor's prison, and their "home-rule" was never to move unless evicted. But when evicted they would go (and they are still going) with all their worldly goods to visit a friend. Gradually the friend would withdraw to other rooms and leave the undesirable tenant in possession. This would place the landlord in the dilemma of that small mother-bird who returns to her nest one day to find it in sole possession of the cuckoo, whom she has unwittingly reared with her own chicks. Such is the tradition of the Dickens' return to Johnson Street, and such might be supposed from investigation of the parish rate book, to have been the method whereby they persuaded the landlord to accept them direct from a debtor's prison in the summer of 1824.

What with the saving in the expense of Charles' schooling and the addition of the small salary, if one can say that he received any as office boy for a lawyer not far from his home, they were able

to persuade the landlord to allow them to stop on. In November of 1828, Charles Dickens left his employer at Lincoln's Inn for what was probably a better position in Gray's Inn. His father had become a Parliamentary reporter, and this lead was followed by his son with great keenness. The proximity of the British Museum also offered Dickens the chance of reaching books on shorthand, in which he acquired a skill that gave him employment for two years as a reporter for an office in Doctors' Commons. All this doubtless had its effect on the family's residence at 13 Johnson Street, for it terminated in 1829.

It will probably be more satisfactory to pause for a moment and examine the evidence for Charles Dickens' residence in Johnson Street, which in spite of the fact that it is referred to vaguely in recent Dickensian literature, is, to use the words of the London County Council, "quite indisputable". The evidence is contained in the parish rate books and is further corroborated by friends and acquaintances who knew Dickens at the time.

Two months after John Dickens petitioned for release from the Marshalsea we find the following entry in the rate books :

JULY 1824 ..... CAROLINE WELDEN .....G

By this we understand (G meaning "gone away") that the lady of this name had relinquished her rights to the Johnson Street house, then numbered *29*, and the following year changed to its present number *13*. Also in the summer

of 1824, John Dickens' affairs being satisfactorily settled, Charles left the blacking factory, and the next entry in the rate books indicates the family's new residence.

JANUARY 1825 ..... CAROLINE ~~WELDEN~~ DICKINS

The mis-spelling of the name of Dickens was in keeping with such other inaccuracies frequent in the careless records of those days and can easily be accepted as a mistake, but what strikes one as difficult is the Christian name, Caroline.

In such records at the beginning of the nineteenth century there are comparatively few women indicated as tenants of houses, but in this case the suggestion of there being not only two women, one following the other as tenants, but both bearing the same Christian name, arrests one's attention. It cannot be that Caroline Welden married John Dickens, but at the same time one is reminded of a strong tradition that the first tenant was a close friend, if not an actual relation, of the Dickens family. However, the letter G made clear that the "Welden" lady made her exit in the year 1824, when we know the financial difficulties of John Dickens were finally settled. The correction indicating the new tenant's arrival is made by a pencil line drawn through the surname, Welden, and doubtless causing the confusion by not carrying on through the Christian name in front of it. Also the informal entry of the name of the new tenant after the *Welden* might account for its being wrongly spelled. The mistake once made,

it was continued throughout the Dickens' residence, as will be seen by the next three entries :

JULY 1825 ..... CAROLINE DICKINS
JANUARY 1826 ..... CAROLINE DICKINS
JANUARY 1827 ..... CAROLINE DICKINS

The next entry is accompanied with a note indicating that Dickens was summoned on Lady Day, about a month before Charles was taken from his new school and sent to learn the legal trade of office cleaning. It read thus :

DICKINS
JULY 1827 ..... SAMUEL VERNON

Looking into the sewer rates, an unpleasant subject in more ways than one and naturally avoided by other ratepayers since John Dickens' day, we find this Samuel Vernon set down as being the sole occupier of No. 13 during the very time that the Dickens family are due at the Polygon ; and since at the beginning of the year this " Caroline Dickins " was owing one pound three and four out of her twenty pound rating, for which amount " Dickins " was summoned in July, it would seem the traditional eviction to which we have referred as coming from a direct source, had corroboration. The tradition about the eviction also provides for the surprise visit which followed the Polygon residence and lasted for some time. The following entries therefore naturally appear preserving their original errors :

JANUARY 1828 ..... DICKINS
JULY 1828 ..... CAROLINE DICKINS
JANUARY 1829 ..... CAROLINE DICKINS

The verbal tradition in regard to Johnson Street is valuable. Mary Ann Mitton, who lived as a little girl directly opposite to 13 Johnson Street while Charles Dickens was there, and by whom she was known as "Little Dorrit", was brought to verify what the rate books had indicated. She remembered that the Dickens family had taken the entire No. 13, and many an early morning's excursion with Charles she recalled in the summers between 1824 and 1829. There is a rumour I have not thought it necessary to fathom, about her marrying a comparatively well-to-do Mr. Cooper and helping Charles in his early career.

Also a Mr. Thomas, who knew Dickens as a boy, bore witness to the residence in Johnson Street. But most interesting in the face of present circumstances is the fact that Dr. Danson, who was contemporary with Charles Dickens as a pupil in the original of Mr. Creakle's school, which still stands near by in the Hampstead Road, remembered joining with "C. D." in a search through his boy's library, preserved in a cupboard between the two front windows of the first-floor room of the Johnson Street house, for a book he had lent him. From this child's collection of books was to grow in this same house a children's library known as David Copperfield's.

CHAPTER III

BETWEEN THREE ANCIENT LANDMARKS

THERE are three ancient landmarks which stake the claim of our literary slum around Johnson Street. A church, a bridge and a public-house. The church has changed from Catholic to Protestant—that was two centuries and a half before a child's library was inaugurated at "No. 13" by Charles Dickens—the bridge, or rather another bridge in the same place which used to span the gentle flowing River Fleet, now hangs perilously over the shrieking trains that speed people and things from King's Cross to the limits of the Kingdom, while the public-house, having been rudely deprived of its grounds and rebuilt in a pretentious modern way, remains plying its old trade at the top of the Tottenham Court Road, but hardly in the romantic spirit its tradition merits.

The church, containing as it should the record of that continuous beginning and ending of a community, the life and death of the individuals who compose it, appears on the pages of history about the year 1180. There is a description in the *Speculum Britaniæ* of 1503 that so fits the condition in which the sacred edifice finds itself placed

to-day, that I venture to quote it: "Pancras Church stands alone, utterly forsaken, old and weather-beaten, which for antiquities thereof, is thought not to yield to Pauls of London. About this church have bin manie buildings now decaied, leaving poore Pancras without companion or comfort". The building—that is, a good part of it, for it was rebuilt some twenty years after Dickens' day—has not only the tradition of having heard so early in British History the drone of the Latin Mass, but also it has the distinction of being the last Anglican Church which had the Celebration in that form.[1] In its burying ground, now dug deep indeed for the passage of living souls although not in spirit (unless it be the spirit of the age which constructs huge railway lines, regardless of tradition, and issues pale-coloured tickets to breathless travellers)—in this burying ground before its destruction, was much buried talent and romance.

I have before me a print of the church as Charles Dickens knew it, standing on a hill by the roadside where it does to-day, but at that time raising an eighteenth-century tower amid rustic surroundings that make one feel the nearness of the City impossible.

The modern park, which still preserves the trees and the general appearance of the hill about the church, continues each spring to offer the young

[1] Should the reader be interested in this historic point the *Oxford Press* saw fit to publish a labour of mine entitled, *The Holy Communion in Great Britain and America*, the year after the war.

couples of Somers Town the shelter it afforded to the beginning and close of the romance marked by the grave of Mary Wollstonecraft—that grave, near Godwin's own, where their daughter sat with Shelley and pledged herself to make of Shelley's life the precious thing it became. This sweet sentiment is vitalized with such warlike zeal as Pasquale Paoli, the Corsican general and patriot, brought to the hill when he was buried with the rest some five years before Charles Dickens was born. With what vast discouragement he must have died, who—having rid his native island of the Genoese tyranny, reorganized the Government and founded, among other things, the University at Corte—finally saw his work cut under by the sale of Corsica to France. And when he found—must it always be so?—that the leaders of the people for whom he had striven were unworthy, he summoned a "consulta" and with dignity ceded to France whatever rights they could still be said to hold. This done, he retired to London in the first years of the building of Somers Town, and lived in voluntary exile the last seventeen years of his life. There were other exiles who came not so willingly but full of sorrow and discouragement because there had been none worthy to lead the people. They came from France and, having no native soil that had not been desecrated, "affected to be buried", as a contemporary chronicle put it, in the consecrated ground about the ancient parish church.

The sanctity of the graveyard was not always

so respected. One reference, which is only indicative of what must often have occurred and also suggests something of the neighbourhood during Dickens' boyhood days, since from his own room Charles could see the Hampstead coach driven along the highway on its course from that historic haunt of Jack the Ripper, which became one of Charles Dickens' favourite haunts years later, to the City. In 1772, fifty years before Dickens made his first acquaintance with the neighbourhood, on September 13th, " the Hampstead coach was stopped at Pancras by two footpads, armed with cutlasses, who robbed the passengers of between four and five pounds and, after threatening to murder every person that attempted to apprehend them, made off through the churchyard ".

Dickens writes of his boyhood experience in *David Copperfield*, whose imagination was stirred by reading Smollett, Fielding, Defoe and other novelists in a cheap series which constituted the important part of his library. He would sit looking out of his upper window on to the green fields and the homely objects of his simple life, imagining the characters of the stories. I have myself often sat looking from his window in the back of the Johnson Street house from where I, too, could have seen the old highway had it not been for the houses erected since Dickens' day. It was down that highway that Fielding tells us the coach brought Tom Jones and Partridge on their way from St. Albans. Colonel Jack, so Defoe relates,

made his way up the Tottenham Court Road and along this same highway by the old St. Pancras Church. Charles Dickens, fresh from his associations with that prison where Smollett caused his Roderick Random to be imprisoned for a like charge as that which brought John Dickens into the same place, could not fail to be impressed in his Johnson Street surroundings with the romance of his boyhood reading, for the neighbourhood had changed but little since the times of which the novelists had written.

In those days Dickens could still wander through the shadowy lanes about King's Cross with no thought of the huge railway termini that were later to spoil the district. That part of London remained at the close of the eighteenth century in possession of a small village taking its name from the bridge which we have mentioned before. At Battle Bridge itself is formed one of the deepest pools in English history. The banks of the Fleet, which was spanned by the bridge at this point, had been fiercely contested by Alfred of the Danes. Here, too, the native queen, Boadicea, had herself led her Britons against the Roman cohorts of Paulinus. Nor were the eighty thousand Britons who fell by the edge of the sword as they fled back through the swamps (where now stand the houses of Somers Town) easily to be forgotten.

That King John's palace, situated at what is now the other end of the Euston Road from King's Cross, should have become a manor house and finally a tavern, is to my mind a legitimate line

of descent which gives the present-day public-house the right to retain so ancient sounding a title as "The Adam and Eve", for although the Royal Palace of to-day, with its many new guests, is a house which might almost be termed "public", if not "republic", the simplicity of King John's court must have had the same convivial atmosphere of friends-met-together which made the old tavern so delightful. Such was the history of the site where now, as always, the Tottenham Court Road meets the Hampstead Road. All this had been accomplished by 1645, for in that year we find a record of a shilling fine imposed on three serving-maids for "drinking at Tottenhall Court on the Sabbath daie".

It was a century later before this public-house reached the height of the popularity which Hogarth awards it in his *March to Finchley*, and then it was more as an out-of-town resort, such as one might find at Maidstone to-day. There now came a time of extensive building north of where to-day run Oxford Street and Theobald's Road. The Duke of Bedford led society to the district by building a mansion facing into our Bloomsbury Square, with the result of a gradually accumulating number of handsome residences. One of the neighbourhood's great attractions as late as 1787, when Queen's Square nearby was purposely left with the north side open, was the uninterrupted view of the twin hills of Hampstead and Highgate.

This open country to the north, on whose borders stood the "Adam and Eve," owes all its

building to the years that followed. In 1756 a road (which aroused the protests of the noble duke, who objected to the dust and noise of coaches, never dreaming, or if so, only vaguely as one might suffer a nightmare, that three of the world's great railway stations were, in time, to leer across the road at his exclusive estate) was cut along the southern side of the tavern, connecting Marylebone with the village of Battle Bridge. In the seventeen nineties, however, the houses of Somers Town must have stopped the view abruptly north of this highway called the Euston Road.

About the time Dickens came with his books to Johnson Street the "Adam and Eve" suffered the corruption of the serpent. It "became a place of some promiscuous resort, and persons of the worst character and description were in the constant habit of frequenting it; highwaymen, footpads, pickpockets and common women formed its leading visitors, and it became so great a nuisance to the neighbourhood that the magistrates interfered, the organ was banished, the skittle grounds destroyed and the gardens dug up". It is impossible that the keen observance of the boy, "C. D.", failed to discover the romance of this place. He may have searched the bushes for an opening to the subterraneous passage-way which came as part of the inheritance from the former manor and provided the *deus machina* of a certain creepy story.

It was while Dickens was going to school in the

Hampstead Road that Euston Square was formed, and not until he left Johnson Street did St. Pancras finally exchange its fields for streets. In fact, during his residence there St. Pancras must be counted among the parishes, districts and villages which surrounded London in its largest sense of "the City", the City of Westminster and the Borough of Southwark.

About the middle of the century, Oakley Square, with its remarkable broad-walk, above whose shade-trees rises the great spire of the established church, together with the other gardens just north of Johnson Street, appeared. And even as late as this, if one looked around the brick city, one would have observed Knightsbridge still an outlying village, Hackney, Newington, Marylebone, Islington, Chelsea and Kensington as rural hamlets, and Belgravia, luxuriating in open fields, where several of my own friends have assured me they once found excellent snipe-shooting. It seemed to be north of Oxford Street chiefly that the vast congeries of streets and houses first began to spoil the countryside around the little house where Charles Dickens began his collection of boys' books.

There are so-called Londoners to whom the streets, streets, streets of the large city are depressing. Personally I have a patient artist friend who has so often tramped me about town, rushing me from one side of a street to another, dragging me through covered alleys, and on one occasion, I remember, even planting me flat against the front door of a dignified residence that from the top

step I might have the proper elevation, that in this delightful way I have been duly thrilled with the vistas and towers and façades of London.

But what pleases me most about London is its modernness. If it be true that, up until the time when the city wall ceased to be relied upon for defence, ordinary houses were discouraged within a mile radius, the orderly streets familiar to those whose business does not carry them into the ancient arena known as the "City", have grown up with a modern history which can be understood without too great an imagination. Nor is the ancient City free from this delightful modernity. Perhaps the wholesale destruction caused by the Great Fire is responsible for this changed aspect, or even more likely, it is the inevitable rebuilding which enables an ancient and ever-growing capital to meet the strain of recently invented transportation. This is in marked contrast with such a city as Florence where the Medici palaces are so solid, so easily adaptable to present-day methods, that few new buildings have been raised. Likewise it contrasts with a new city like New York, where the entire skyline has been made strange since the beginning of our century by structures that have been thrown up with the mechanism of powerful trades unions and electric cranes of a time so recent as hardly to deserve the term historic. It is in the years between the feudal era in which we live and the Middle Ages that dwellings in England were constructed with a human feeling which draws the sympathy of the ordinary man like myself.

One understands the workmen as human individuals, not menials of a slave-driving Pharaoh or wheels of a chartered company. To be sure the

David Copperfield's Library and the Home of Charles Dickens' Boyhood.

imagination of the average individual is small, and his taste, if not governed by a strong tradition, is poor, but for all that, left to himself there is something homely in the way he lays his bricks

and plasters his walls. He is too matter-of-fact to be fantastic, he is too human to be mechanical.

In such a spirit as this, Johnson Street—the very name seems to indicate what I mean—was created. The need had suddenly arisen because of the migration of Royalists fleeing from the tyranny of French Communists, who seemed to have lost their own heads in the attempt to behead their oppressors.

The then Earl of Somers secured permission to house some of the refugees in the swampy property to which we have referred between Camden Town and the mansions of Bloomsbury. In fact, the materials left over from the construction of these mansions are said to have provided an inexpensive means of throwing together the " jerry-built " two-storied houses which line the broad streets of Somers Town. But the contractor, Leroux, was a Frenchman, as was also the builder, Denton, so that the proportions of the houses and the details of the construction were more pleasing than one would have expected. The main avenues were worthy of their elegant residents. But Johnson Street being a side street, was for long unlighted and marked with the ruts of an unpaved roadway.

Our No. 13, probably in Dickens' time thought hardly to merit the plaster which later became necessary to preserve it from the elements, presented originally a red brick surface. The single parlour window, protected from the street by a simple iron railing, and a small doorway arched at the top with a fanlight, limited the

width of the residence, and following the rule of the neighbourhood, two floors above lighted by two windows each marked its height, the gable roof being hidden by a plain cornice.

At the back of the house a small yard was half taken up with a "lean-to" and a washhouse, where the copper was built into a corner and probably served other purposes than merely the washing of clothes. The high garden walls were broken to admit the passage of air between the similar yards on either side, and embedded in the back wall which cut off the green fields of the Duke of Bedford's estate, was the boundary stone carved with the inscription "D. of B".

The proportions of the interior were as charmingly designed as the outside. The necessarily narrow passage-way, which led from the front door to the back, was divided with a small arch supported by fluted architraves. This formed the entrance, as it were, to the hall, with its wooden stairs broken half-way by a landing which turned them back, and protected by a miniature balustrade. Into this passage opened the front parlour and the kitchen. The two first-floor rooms, divided by double doors which opened back, afforded a comparatively large apartment, with its back window looking out to the distant Camden Town. The top floor divided itself into a large front room and a small bedroom in the rear. Above this the gabled roof allowed a roomy attic.

Thus it must have stood at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a charming little villa just

right for a small family of small means. Nor was it many years after its construction that John Dickens took his family to live within its four walls.

The Dickens family probably strained the capacity of the miniature residence, but in the course of time, when the reconstruction of the Drury Lane district cleared many of its former inhabitants into Somers Town, the building lost its dignity as a private residence, and like the house in the parable that was swept and garnished, it became the abode of such a pack of residents that it could hardly be thought of as anything more than a badly planned tenement. I have known for a fact that as many as thirty people have been regularly fed and sheltered in one of these tiny villas. The natural result was that, like a boot constantly worn by too large a foot, the building was soon out of shape.

Before all the people had cleared out for us, we started, with a first-class firm of builders, to attack the ground floor. What we found has a decided social interest in discovering the sort of abode in which white people, many of them merely reduced by bad luck and ill health, are compelled to live. Out of justice for those thousands who have every chance of existing for at least one generation more in buildings of which this 13 Johnson Street was typical, I will take the liberty of noting the condition of the house as we found it, without exaggeration, but in detail.

Our first act was to fumigate the rooms as thoroughly as possible, in order to kill the vermin

that swarmed about the outside of the woodwork. We then proceeded to rip up the floorboards, which could be stamped through without difficulty in many places. The result of this was so like uncovering a cesspool, it was almost impossible to continue work for some time. It seems the drain in the backyard had been in the habit of overflowing and running through the house beneath the floor. The stairway was in such a dangerous condition that the whole case had to be taken outside and carefully reconstructed. In the front parlour the window casing fell away from the wall of its own accord, and in the kitchen it was possible to reach one's hand through a hole in the bricks at the back of the fireplace into the neighbour's coal-box on the opposite side of the wall. Whether this hole had served to empty our neighbour's coal-box or our own grate, is a question. So infested was the house with "bugs"—any compromise of the term would be unfair—that on taking off the mouldings on the door and window frames, we found it would have been impossible to have placed the head of a pin on the protected surface of the wood without disturbing one of these flat-bodied crustaceans. One of the sincerest tributes Charles Dickens has ever received is, undoubtedly, the willingness and care which enthused the British workman to struggle with the clearing and reconstructing of the house in which he had lived years before.

It was about this time that Mr. Cecil Harmsworth asked me to meet him at the Foreign Office,

It seems that in his effort to preserve Dr. Samuel Johnson's house in Gough Square, he had been confronted with the fact that all the mantelpieces and finishings of any value had been removed, when the City ceased to be a place of residence. This had been a serious hindrance toward restoring the original character of the residence. But in the case of this small, cheaply built house, whose precious association with the youth of Dickens had only been identified with certainty in 1911, there would have been small chance for the removal of anything by housebreakers or souvenir hunters. For this reason Mr. Harmsworth urged that every detail be preserved in the way we found it. The wisdom of this was evident, and after six months' work and an expenditure of almost one thousand pounds, we were able to feel that should John Dickens have returned, without noticing the rest of the neighbourhood, he would have been as pleased with No. 13 Johnson Street as he had formerly been in the years between 1824 and 1829.

CHAPTER IV

THE PASSING OF THE THREE FLOORS OUT

If the spirits of Godwin, Shelley, Mazzini and a host of others that hover around the sequestered precincts of Johnson Street—the high-boxed coaches that roll noiselessly along the ancient highways from Hampstead and Highgate, the romantic couples and cutlassed highwaymen who remain half hidden among the trees on the slopes of the hill where stands the Old St. Pancras Church, and even the wan form of the boy Dickens on his way back and forth from the blacking factory or the school—must be placed in another world and classed as ghosts, far more must the people of to-day, powerful and distinguished as they may be, who venture into Somers Town from the outside, be understood as living on another plane which makes them as unreal and intangible to the natives themselves as these spirits of the past. There are rare occasions when some eminent "toff" deigns to cross the borders of this "Forbidden City", and as long as he confines himself to observing and being observed, he is treated as one treats a fiction character in reading a novel. But the moment he dares to take any steps which may affect the rents or wages or children of the

community, those steps are suspected and precautions are taken by the residents to see that such steps leave no footprints behind them in the traditional life of the community.

I can remember being interrupted when on the point of signing a document which was to make us the responsible owners of Dickens' boyhood home for the next ten years, by an excited visitor. It was the inmate of the first-floor back of No. 13 Johnson Street, who had hastened with great stir of emotion to inform us that the ceiling had fallen in her apartment on an unfortunate woman about to give birth to a child. They understood we had come into possession of the house and accordingly demanded heavy compensation for the damage done to the woman and child—not to speak of the furnishings of the room that had been destroyed in the accident. There was something in the care with which all this damage had been estimated that made me wonder whether the new owners were not being "tried out"; and the change in attitude when I showed the distressed messenger the unsigned documents, proving that the responsibility had not yet been undertaken by us, convinced me of the fact.

On visiting the scene of destruction a few minutes later to see if there were anything I could do, I was left without the smallest doubt that the occupant of the room, who had formerly been allowed to repair this ceiling himself, had also pulled it down and destroyed his small collection of furniture on the speculation of greater recom-

pense than the things were worth. I give this "artful dodge" in detail because later I found it to be a common practice in a neighbourhood that had been thoroughly spoiled by promiscuous charity. So complete was the accumulated experience of generations that the knowledge of how to tap charitable funds had become little short of a fine art.

The continuous advice from Mr. Lichtenburg, from whom we purchased the second lease, was largely responsible for the successful action necessary before we could come into anything but nominal possession. Mr. Lichtenburg, a German who had used *The Christmas Carol* as a text-book for his learning of English, had taken over the rents of No. 13, together with those of most of the other houses in the neighbourhood, from the man who had himself collected the rent from John Dickens (father of the author). This former rent-collector, Mr. Lichtenburg tells me, had in the course of time been forced to evict Mr. Dickens, who had, however, a few months after the eviction, surprised the owner by turning up and continuing his residence! It is from this same source also we learn of the relationship between Caroline Welden and John Dickens.

Eviction, Mr. Lichtenburg assured me in the dilemma in which I found myself at that time, would be the only means of moving the present tenants, some of whom he had had on his hands for the past fifty years. Indeed, I soon learned that the term eviction carried no opprobrium with

it and was, in fact, the only means of letting your tenants know that your request was seriously meant. Instructed, therefore, in detail as to the required dates and hours, the slightest variance from which the tenants watched in hope that the action might be declared illegal, I proceeded with an action which, although it was taken as a matter of course by these tenants of the former owner, was a tedious experience of the most anxious sort for me. Armed with the blue papers, whose very colour is as familiar to the residents of Somers Town as the outside wrapper of one's income tax is familiar to people living in the West End, and accompanied by a witness, I set out to serve the first notice on the stubborn inhabitants—they were not in any sense our tenants—of 13 Johnson Street.

Johnson Street itself possesses a rather embarrassing atmosphere. Of the two blocks which comprise its entire length, the one which runs out of the busy thoroughfare of Seymour Street has no open space at the backs of the houses, and for this reason—the street itself only serving its normal purpose when an occasional coal cart or taxi brings its driver for a few minutes of home, borrowed from the day's work—the fronts of the houses disclose what the backs would otherwise conceal. On entering the street you are conscious of having stepped into the most intimate family circle. I used to feel I ought to apologize for my presence.

Even late in the morning there is a population

of women gossiping in their doorways or conversing from their windows on opposite sides of the street. Nor would their dishevelled hair and slipped-on clothes remove the feeling that your arrival was not expected. The truth is they have risen early to prepare breakfast for the workers of the family, then there has followed the business of getting the children off to school, and before they have had time for a bit of gossip, there would have been the midday meal to shop for. However, somebody's clothes are hanging on the front railings every day in the week, and babies are being bathed or nursed on the broad doorsteps, so that with all the leisure there is a contented activity giving assurance that they are planning to be there the next day and the day after—which is their way of contemplating eternity.

It was late in the afternoon that I turned into Johnson Street on my uncomfortable mission, grasping the two eviction notices well down the depths of my pockets, lest by any chance they should display a blue corner to the ever-watchful public.

The clothes were still drying on the front railings, but at this hour of the day they seem always to flap with the gala display of allied flags, whose indecipherable combination of colours thrill the passer-by with a sense of holiday excitement. I would observe here that this custom of washing one's "soiled linen in public" is done, but after a different manner, in the West End.

I had not gone a yard before I found myself among a group of young men. It was late enough

to be after the day's work, and in the pre-war days, when there had been a chance of picking up a job from day to day, the custom of meeting on this street corner after work had been formed and was still regularly observed. They were not a heterogeneous collection of lads, but a definite group or club with a recognized leader. They would spasmodically constitute themselves into a football team, collect sufficient funds for the purchase of a football, and as long as the ball held together they would practise up and down their part of Johnson Street. Their costume, in addition to the ordinary citizen's clothes, whose appearance showed at once whether they had a job or not, was a scarf tied smartly around the neck and a cap worn jauntily on one side of the head. As the man who has enjoyed the education of Eton knows the supreme art of wearing a top-hat, so the lad who has had the schooling of the London streets is the master of the art of giving style to the most impossible of head-gear, an English cap.

They were a keen, outspoken lot, these lads, who had just finished the gay, irresponsible years of boyhood which are able to give a rich glow to the most colourless surroundings, and in the normal way I would have spent a few minutes with them. As it was, without even a glance down "Little Hell", the questionable alley-way leading from that part of Johnson Street to the parish church, I hastened on down the street. Even the improvised cricket team of schoolboys who hailed me in passing, did not slacken my nervous haste. It

seemed, I learned later, somebody's little brother, who had been serving as "wicket" in the absence of that important part of the sports-kit, sitting with his back to the bowler and patiently balancing two small blocks of wood on the top of his head, had moved, and in consequence the bails had fallen just at the crucial moment when the ball and the bat had struck other parts of his body. This perilous position of wicket in the game was much coveted for the authoritative voice it gave the small boy in the decision as to play. On this occasion I had been called to settle a deadlock which still remained a matter of public opinion. But at the time, I excused myself and hastened on.

Johnson Street would not be the sociable centre it is if it were not for the "Marquis of Hastings", who receives guests within legal hours on the corner where Clarendon Street cuts across. This "pub" is in a literal sense a half-way house for the traveller from one end of Johnson Street to the other. A few little iron tables and chairs on the pavement outside its doors would have been a pleasant addition, for although the appearance of the building rather jarred with the late eighteenth-century character of the street, the spirit of an old tavern still clung about it. However, in the windows read the sign, NO DRINKING ALLOWED OUTSIDE THESE PREMISES. To the present day I am not sure whether it was caution instituted by the police to prevent the blocking of the little-used pavement, or whether it was merely the officious monopoly of the red-faced

proprietor within. This attraction, I also scorned —on this occasion.

When I had gone half-way down the second block of Johnson Street on the left-hand side, I stopped and knocked twice, wondering, as I looked at the unpolished brass figures on the door, whether the number "13" was really lucky. The two knocks signified the approach of a visitor to the second floor, and having so far observed the sanctity of the possessors of our house, I proceeded up the two flights of rickety stairs. The windows, boarded up for lack of glass, helped little towards guiding one's feet around the irregular landings or protecting one's head against the low ceiling. They did, however, preserve a smell of neglect which was natural to that portion of the house which was more than one person's duty to keep clean.

In answer to my knock the door to the front room was opened by a young man of neat appearance, who introduced me to his wife. The white curtains at the window, the immaculate counterpane, which took up a large part of the room in covering a double bed of iron ornamented with brass fixtures—there was a delightful freshness which the hall-way had hardly warranted.

Rather embarrassing, I thought, as I noticed a half-consumed meal on the table before the open fire. And then, observing a couple of babies almost hidden in the white coverings of a crib beside the bed, I turned my attention to them. Twins! They had arrived a short time ago. Dear little things! What a beast I was to intrude!

Crunching the blue paper on which I had carefully inscribed the names of these people, without drawing it out of my pocket, I apologized for the interruption of so pleasant a family scene and made my escape. The "Micawber Twins", I thought, as I felt for the top step, in the very room where that entertaining gentleman raised his own family.

The top step must have been missing. At any rate I missed it, for in another instant I was thudding downstairs on my back. I arrived in a sitting posture opposite the hall door on the first floor with extraordinary promptness, and seemed to have struck the door with the force of my body, for it was opened at once.

"What are you doing here?" was the difficult question put by a woman whose large figure I could see blocking the doorway.

"Well, really," I protested, "that was the question I was about to ask you." For since the former landlord had given them ample notice before we had taken over, they had little reason for still remaining in possession.

I think the lady had planned to terrify me, but seeing my plight, she became confused and in another minute was pleading through a veil of tears which might easily have driven me from her presence but for an interruption from behind. The voice, which broke from the interior of the room, was indeed terrifying, and she withdrew.

By this time I had regained my feet and stood looking over the broad expanse of a double bed to where a man lay facing me. He raised him-

self on one elbow and pointing a steady hand at me as though it had been a revolver, said with slow emphasis: "I don't want to waste words with you, young man. What I will do is to talk this over before the magistrate in court".

"Then, sir," I said, accepting him at his word, "here is your invitation." Therewith I handed him the fatal blue paper, and like the messenger in the first chapter of *Treasure Island*, departed without another word.

"If you had not broken in——" I could hear the wife shout to the husband as I gained the street door. And really, if he had not interrupted, I do not know when there would have been books for the children in the rooms they were occupying.

The people on the ground floor had been considerate enough to leave when the former landlord had given them notice, although the old wife did return a year later, after we had completely restored the house for the children, and said it was a pity she had ever thought of leaving. She was an old body whose bonnet-strings made me feel as I always feel when I see a dog suffering in a tightly strapped collar. She wished she had known it could look so nice. She wished she had known we were going to make such a fuss about Dickens, because she remembered her mother had found three large bundles of paper, written all over with Charles Dickens' name on the outside, under the stairs where she now noted with approval we had put the gas-meter—but then they were so yellow and torn and scratched out they would

be worth nothing—still, she wished she had known! She was altogether in a state of wishing she had known. Personally, I wished she had too, as far as the juvenile manuscripts of Charles Dickens were concerned.

The scenes that followed in the local court I hesitate to describe lest I should again bring myself into the shelter of that detestable building. I will say that I was bullied by the officials, my case was thrown out on grounds of absurd technicalities, which were not mentioned in the second appeal, and in short, if the magistrate had not seen that I had "dug myself in", I am sure these occupants of the first floor, who out of a steady income of five pounds a week had paid no rent in the past ten years, would have continued their existence in the house called ours. If there were any trial, it was merely a trial of my own sweet patience. The wife, with her tears of persuasion, appeared alone at court with somebody else's baby, borrowed for effect, while the bombastic gentleman remained, as far as I know, supported on one elbow in bed, for I never laid eyes on him after.

As far as the parents of the twins were concerned, I determined to do my best for them. Having advertised in several local papers, I was able to offer them eight or nine alternative places a few minutes' walk from the wretched slum where they had grown up. One set of rooms nearby seemed such a possible blessing for the twins that I offered to endow them with the rent. But so

attached were they to Johnson Street that until the process of blue papers had succeeded with the people on the floor below them, they could not bring themselves to part with the house where they paid no rent. Finally, all these good people decamped with their possessions to the other side of the street, where they live happily to the present day.

There can be no question of the fact that the sincere attachment which the Cockney feels for the soil that lies under the London pavements, makes him a true Londoner to a degree that shows up the great bulk of inhabitants of the Metropolis as mere transient and unappreciative visitors. The average Englishman undoubtedly looks on London not so much as a city, as a place.

CHAPTER V

THE BUILDERS OF THE LIBRARY

THE house in Johnson Street, as Charles Dickens knew it, was in structural appearance exactly as it stands to-day. It was planned and constructed three or four years before the nineteenth century by a builder whose firm still continues, but without the professional direction of an architect. So completely had architectural traditions become engrafted in the minds of artisans, that any ordinary builder could be trusted in those days to erect a simple, dignified residence, soundly put together, in charming proportions. Invariably one finds in the interior of houses of this type and time good ceilings, refined fireplaces, and everything carefully joined and finished throughout; while on the exterior are proportioned windows often screened by delicate iron balconies and panelled doors crowned with fanlights of delightful tracery.

To me it is the most satisfactory of all architectural periods in England. Nor is it apparent in England alone, for in America, where architects were seldom available, many charming residences both in town and country bear witness to the value of the period to which Johnson Street belongs. The home which George Washington built for him-

self on the high bank overlooking the Potomac, is a single example of what I mean. Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia, with its original treatment of a brick wall, is another.

Whether it was that in the succession of apprentices traditions became weakened, or whether pedantic ideas were imposed by professional architects, there came a contention between Classic and Gothic that resulted in the ordinary builder losing all sense of proportion and refinement.

It would seem that when the Elgin Marbles arrived in London, the group of Pericles threatening Phideas had come to life, and the Dictator had set his baldheaded sculptor to the task of making London a Greek city. The year in which Mrs. Dickens set up her girls' school in Gower Street, Inwood finished a new parish church for St. Pancras which so piled the classic "Ossa on Pelion" that it proved the best argument against its own style, while not far from the site of the girls' school in the same street, and the year before their leaving, one could have seen the building of Smirk's British Museum and Wilkins' University College, which one admires to-day as more worthy examples of the Classic.

Counter to this invasion of Pericles and his Phideas, the Gothic hordes raised such barriers as the Houses of Parliament. Meanwhile builders whose taste and sense were sufficient to enable them to construct independently such houses as those in Johnson Street, joined one army or the other, and as is usual in war of any sort, "Mr. John Citizen"

suffered. No. 13 Johnson Street, however, escaped any change further than a preservative coating of plaster, for which we are probably indebted indirectly to that Mr. Nash who "found us all brick and left us all stucco".

Before investigating the neighbourhood around Johnson Street which Charles Dickens knew so well as a boy, it would be well to consider the general conditions around the time of his residence in the street. These years were momentous in the life of the future novelist, and they marked the beginning of a great era for London and its Empire. They carry us through the reign of George IV, far enough into the reign of William of the same number, for us to foresee the Princess Victoria's becoming Queen in 1837. It must be remembered that it is a London of one and a half million souls living almost within sound of Bow bells which Dickens knew in those days, as compared with the seven million men and women who spread themselves over a vast area to-day. Further, the expenditure of thirteen million pounds, which our London County Council finds necessary to secure the health and convenience of the metropolis, was hardly required in the time of which we write. Gas, for example, had only been introduced as lighting for streets in 1867, and in neighbourhoods such as Somers Town the residents doubtless would have felt it so costly to hang out oil lamps that they would have left the streets in darkness. The civic government left most public responsibilities to private care. The fire brigade and the

system of main drainage are due to the National Board of Works dating from 1885, a body whose powers were taken over by the "L.C.C." in 1888. The water supply remained in private hands until 1902. Even with public education, although the Government appointed a committee to inspect schools in 1818, it showed small concern until 1870 for State education. There was a popular movement for the education of the masses during Charles Dickens' boyhood which seemed to benefit him little, but at the same time effected the founding of hundreds of voluntary schools throughout the parishes.

The Vestry of a parish constituted a local government for such a parish as St. Pancras and not infrequently controlled more than one town. Under the St. Pancras Vestry fell the collection of houses erected in the swampy land north of the Euston Road toward the close of the eighteenth century, and named after John, first Earl of Somers, who was Lord Chancellor in the reign of Queen Anne. The swamp was part of his estate, and for all the credit it does him, the present deplorable condition of Somers Town preserves his lordship's name "in the mire" to-day, although the title died out.

CHAPTER VI

MR. MICAWBER AND THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

THERE is nothing I know of more desolate or lacking in human feeling, unless it be the Arctic Ocean (I have only observed this body of water through a spy-glass), than a just finished house. There is a smell of freshness that is rather pleasant, but it might be the freshness of a newly constructed tomb. There are no human marks on the wall, and the ceilings glare with an unnatural whiteness. The panes in the windows are clean, but they have not yet acquired sufficient gloss to show that they have been warmed by the constant polishing of the housewife's hand.

Nor are there any chairs with arms extended to welcome the visitor. Or, should they have arrived from the furnisher's, they stand about at uncomfortable angles and give no sign of inclination to fit themselves to the human body. The pictures, if there be any, have not had time to grow into their places, but are rather hung in front of the walls with an uneasy feeling as though they were up for trial.

With our house in Johnson Street I venture to say all this was different. Have you never been

conscious of feeling that the harassing four years of the recent war stood as a thing apart, and the course of your life flowed uninterrupted from August of 1914 immediately, without any of the war's tragic interruptions, to the latter part of 1918, when you began again to live normally? So it seemed with Dickens' old house. All the time of poverty and distress was forgotten, or only remembered as a dream.

The fanlight over the door had been brought back from its long walled-up period when the cost of broken glass was a serious consideration, much as the eye of a sleeper is opened with the suddenness of the morning light, and the vivid ray which was thus allowed to steal again through the passage, seemed contented to linger in the reflected light of huge oblongs of yellow marble painted on the walls. The man with a little pot of varnish whom one had seen passing through Johnson Street of a Sunday morning a century before, touching up the iron knockers and handles of the front doors, was aroused as though he might have been one of the attendants in the palace of the sleeping princess, and having shouted his wares toward the second-floor front, had seen the window open above him and received his instructions to carry on as before, so that now the hand and wreath glistened black against the graining of its round panel.

Nor did the little house of our special consideration stand out alone. The whole street, or at least the lower half of it, seemed to have risen to the occasion. The landlord for the first time in

years painted the fronts of the houses, taking care to remember the colour of their original decoration. And the residents, who had changed least of all under the stress of time and poverty, washed their curtains and whitened their doorsteps with a show of shabby " genteelity " that would have made Mr. Micawber swell with pride.

We must allow the portly gentleman with his " high hat," brandishing his stick or twirling his eyeglass, to bring us, as he brought young " Master Copperfield " of old, to his residence in Johnson Street. He will probably scrape his boots on the bit of iron fixed for the purpose between two of the fence pickets beside the door. This will be out of habit of crossing the muddy street which is now paved. Entering the front door (if you see with his eyes), you will appreciate that the architraves supporting the curve at the end of the passage at least preserve the dignity of an arch borne by stately columns. And the wainscoting which to be sure is wood on one wall but only graining on the wall opposite, gives the feeling of panelling. Whereas the wall covering of marble paper which must have given Mr. Micawber peculiar satisfaction on retiring at night as extending to the very top of the house, was to all purposes, unless investigated with unnecessary care, nothing short of the marble halls of Bloomsbury.

The story of this marble paper is worth a moment's digression. Early one morning Professor A. E. Richardson, who had volunteered to give his authoritative supervision to the recon-

struction of the Johnson Street house, rang me up and warned me that he would breakfast with me in order that we might visit the house on his way to the University in Gower Street. After a prolonged search through many paper factories, he had finally secured marble paper similar to what he felt sure originally hung on the walls. It was hardly with a responsive enthusiasm that I entertained the idea of our precious walls covered with a paper which, because of its lasting qualities, was still preserved by constant applications of varnish in houses long since deprived of their dignity as private residences, and allowing my judgment to be led by my desire I was much inclined to doubt this generally admitted architectural authority. But after breakfast, on investigating the wall in question, from which the builders had scraped five or six layers of paper until, as they thought, they had reached a brown painted surface, we discovered to Richardson's delight and my confusion the conventional pattern of huge marble squares on the walls from the front door to the top of the house. From that time forward my doubting was at an end, and I became technically a disciple, as well as a friend, of the Professor of Architecture of London University.

But to return to Mr. Micawber whom we have left standing in his own passage-way, into which, alas, we know many a creditor edged his way probably ignoring the protests of the Dickens' family servant (who was immortalized in the character of "The Marchioness"), in the hope of bringing

Mr. Micawber down from the top floor. He has probably closed the street door and stepped into the parlour. It will be necessary to pull down the two sections of the wooden shutter which slide easily into their places beneath the window-sill in order to admit a flood of light into the tiny room. If our host stamps disapprovingly on the hard surface of the two and a half feet of concrete which we have run throughout the ground floor, you will understand we have planned a permanent memorial. We have left, however, a few of the original boards sunk in the concrete surface.

He may strike his stick against a beam running across the ceiling from the chimney to the portion of the wall opposite, for this sort of support Professor Richardson has placed in each room to strengthen the floor above without disturbing the structure of the building. In spite of Mr. Micawber's annoyance, it lends additional character to the room without disturbing its original simplicity. As for the old basket-grate with a hearthstone broken perhaps when it was first put in, it held the glowing coals in 1824 as it does to-day. And the low cupboards with their mahogany painted tops on either side provided a shelter for his shilling bottles of wine while they lasted. The wainscoting beneath the chair-rail has been regrained, and the delicate cornice preserved for all these years by layers of ceiling paper has been disclosed. If Mrs. Micawber is not sitting beside the fire with a twin at her breast, you will find her in the kitchen at the back. Indeed, if you have come upon her

unexpectedly, as David Copperfield did on arriving back one evening earlier than usual from his bottle washing, you may also find her with her head under the same old grate.

If you insist on going upstairs, Mr. Micawber may take you past the doors of the first floor with some casual explanation, but you will remember the furniture in those rooms was sent to the pawnbroker, which necessitated the blinds being pulled down to delude the neighbours. In his own room at whose windows one especially objectionable creditor was in the habit of shouting from the other side of the street at an hour when he knew Mr. Micawber would be still in bed, you will note a fine example of the grate of the period, without noting too much the family kit strewn about the room. On coming out on the landing from which a ladder leads to an attic above, Micawber may knock gently on the other door, and inquire if "Master Copperfield" is there. If not, he will open the door and disclose a small chamber, sparsely furnished, whose walls were at one time stencilled with a design resembling a blue muffin.

You may be as incredulous of ghosts as Marley's partner, but so perfectly has the house in Johnson Street, immortalized by the Copperfield story, been restored to its original condition, that on returning home you will admit to your wife at least that the spirit of Micawber is still revelling in the atmosphere of his old home.

In this atmosphere, in the "unfurnished" rooms of the first floor, where the blinds were still

drawn with the purpose of deluding the neighbours, I sat on the Christmas Eve a few days after the reconstruction work was complete, reading the *Christmas Carol* aloud. Except for the high-backed chair on which I was seated, and the table on which my text rested in the light of the primitive argand burner, there was nothing one could term furniture more than a second table, long and low, and surrounded by chairs of a size that gnomes might use in the absence of mushrooms. As it was, they were filled with twenty small boys, their happy faces displaying such an abundance of high spirits in the flickering light of many candles scattered along the table, that one thing alone could have kept them quiet long enough to hear the magic story of the Cratchit family. They were eating mountainous bergs of coloured jelly, which were the more pleasingly devoured because they took up so little room inside. Small loaves of bread spread with jam, so puffed out with baker's skill that they too vanished into nothing within. An occasional gurgle showed how little the feast distracted the listeners, however, and we sat there in all the silence of a monastic refectory, as when one of the younger brothers is reading aloud. Occasionally I looked into the shadows of the opposite side of the room, where a coal fire crackled through the bars of the ancient grate. Was there another lad sitting beside the fire with one foot curled up under him? As the story gave me opportunity, I looked again. I had not been wrong. And the more I looked the more real he

became. The long, tight trousers, the short jacket, the hair falling about his broad white collar—the figure grew more distinct. A book was open on his lap. It was *Robinson Crusoe,* or was it the *Arabian Nights*? One could not see distinctly, for the page was in the shadow, and the boy's eyes were gazing into the dancing flames. How warm they crackled and laughed up the chimney !

And now my attention was drawn back to the feast which was still going on in the silence of the candlelight. The little urchins in their ragged clothes seemed to shout and laugh with glee, but never a noise disturbed the dream. Behind them were rows and rows of new books, multi-coloured and glistening with gold letters on their backs.

My dream, if it were mine, or if it had been a dream at all—for certainly which was real and which was imagined I could not have said at the moment—was suddenly broken by an irrepressible shout from the revellers. We had reached that point in the story at which the anxiety of the Cratchits for the pudding steaming in the copper at the back of the house becomes tense. And these youngsters, knowing from the low walls of their own backyards in Johnson Street, that there was every possibility of someone climbing over and stealing away such a pudding, had come with one mind to the decision that someone must go down and inspect the copper. But no boy runs without a " pal " in Somers Town, and therefore two were chosen to descend the dark stairway and go out of the back door to the washhouse. Long

before they had managed to scramble back up the elusive stairs, they announced to the assembled party that the pudding of the story was again actually floating in the steaming water of the old copper. And when the pudding itself arrived, with its holly crackling in the burning brandy, a familiar greeting hailed the reality of the half-believed tale.

Such was the party that resulted from the turkey which the Cratchits, as the Little Theatre Company had interpreted them in a benefit performance some time before, did not really eat, but left for Nelson Keys to auction for this " next Christmas " celebration. All that afternoon before Christmas Day hundreds of children had poured into 13 Johnson Street from the squalid houses about, to see the books which had been sent them by authors, publishers and illustrators, and to receive some memento from the gay little tree which stood in the very room where Charles Dickens had kept his own books as a boy. And that same night twenty special friends with whom I had " trekked " many a mile in Scout clothes, were invited to the historic dinner.

They had been warned to bring a stocking each, and before they left that night there were nineteen stockings—there is in every fairy story always one who does not do what the rest do, and in this case the one had to be provided with a large biscuit tin —hanging from the little wooden shelf above the fire, the biscuit tin occupying a large part of the broken hearthstone. And the unbelievable part

—except to children, who have a great understanding of such things—was that although the variety of socks and stockings (for some were long, coloured silk affairs, probably relics of their mothers' courting days, and some stubby things of brown wool which might easily have tramped through France or Gallipoli), hung flabby the night before, and although the children met me coming to the house early Christmas morning (so that I could have had nothing to do with the miracle over night), when we rushed upstairs we discovered that they were so fat and bulging with things inside that it was almost painful to see them. Who could have done it? The children knew, but I would warn the reader not to be too certain of his own conclusions.

CHAPTER VII

THE TIMBER-YARD FIRE

How the children finally came into the Library at 13 Johnson Street, and what they found in the old house, which many of them had known only too well as a filthy, tumble-down villa, neither safe nor sanitary, is a joyful story to relate. Gradually, but only gradually, so that it might have the strength of material growth, the working of the little Library took the form which had been set by the precedent of Charles Dickens' own library in the same house a century before.

There was one alarming interruption in the form of a second house warning. We had enjoyed a peculiarly successful afternoon session in the newly decorated house, which showed how well our experiment was proving. The charming way in which the old building had responded to care and expense we had lavished on it, was fully appreciated by the children as well as ourselves. The best of cork-matting had been laid, but so recently that it was still to be fastened down. The walls were hung with original drawings and the precious books made a showing that would equal, if not excel, any collection in the kingdom. The children had not more than left their house that

evening when a commotion started which was to last all night.

The Tiny Tim of the Library, a little cripple who had been so badly knocked about that he was now, at the age of twelve, only just able to walk, having no use of his hands or arms or neck—even his tongue seemed crippled, and only his spirit danced continuously with a joy and freedom which imparted happiness to a room full of children—this Tiny Tim had been taken to his house, next but one to the Library. As he lay on the arrangement of chairs which formed his bed in the corner of a back room he saw in a mirror the reflection of fire. His quick mind grasped the situation. The great timber-yard, which was piled thirty feet high at the backs of the houses on our side of Johnson Street, was alight. In his effort to give the alarm he managed to get out into the hall-way, where he tumbled downstairs. This method of attracting attention, which cost him many weeks subsequently in a hospital, was the beginning of the commotion that did little more than make the event more memorable.

The over-populated tinder-boxes which surrounded the woodyard were in a moment scenes of wild excitement. The twenty engines, which finally bent their efforts to preserving the wretched houses while the mahogany and rose and other precious woods with which the yard was stacked blazed away, did not appear until the inhabitants were convinced that they were witnessing another "Fire of London". Indeed, if there had been a

wind in any direction, Somers Town would have been swept from the map of London. But there was no wind, and the wood just burned hot and fierce. It charred whatever other wood was exposed in the back, so that chickens and pigeons were roasted, like the pigs of Elia, in their sheds, and the few panes of glass that had not been smashed in years gone by were cracked like the pieces of a picture puzzle. In the meantime, all the precious chairs and tables and pictures and beds that had never been moved from their places in the filthy rooms, except when the rent money was not forthcoming, came tumbling out of the passage-ways, lighted only by the excited glare from the scorching flames. Out they came into the centre of Johnson Street as though they were being made ready for further bonfires. Many strangers appeared to help, and ended by helping themselves to such an extent that the piles in the street soon disappeared, to the despair of their owners. One ancient blind lady, who had been bedridden for years in the front room at the top of one of the houses, leaped from the couch on which she had hoped shortly to die of old age, and threw her bed out of the window on to someone's head below. Then suddenly remembering her infirmity at the appearance of youthful rescuers, she insisted on being carried downstairs with the utmost difficulty.

As for the Library, which excited universal concern, it stood a good chance of being utterly destroyed. When the firemen did finally arrive,

they carried one of their hose-lines through our front door, along the passage and out of the window on the stairway. From the roof of the extension they played a stream all night, sometimes hissing in the gigantic furnace over our backyard wall, sometimes splashing along the walls of the houses. The room in the adjoining house corresponding to the room at the top-floor back in which Charles Dickens slept, and which now contained every personal possession that I valued most in the world, had its ceiling entirely washed out by this hose shooting in through the broken window. From 7.30 until the morning following, the fire roared like some wild animal finding itself surrounded, while twenty streams of water kept it at bay. The drains were in such condition that the water had no escape except through the houses. This resulted in a stream, two feet deep, rushing into our back door, swirling about in our newly decorated rooms on the ground floor so that chairs and boxes floated, as they do in the *Mill on the Floss*, and finally gushing out of the front door, which was held open by the hose-lines. It fulfilled one's imagination of the manner in which Hercules might have cleaned the Augean Stables. The cork-matting rode the tide like a raft, and even twenty-four hours after the fire had been extinguished the domestic rivers continued through some of the houses.

As for the upstairs rooms of the Library, where the water had seeped through the multitude of cracks which showed in every window, there was

little damage done. Our comparative escape was attributed by the neighbourhood to a religious procession, which had paused in its progress through Johnson Street the day before long enough to allow the swinging censor to send clouds of incense in at the open door. It was suggested by one of our neighbours that insurance companies would do well to consider the blessing of timber-yards. The books, which were in the first-floor front, remained unharmed, and considering the fact that nobody was injured further than our Tiny Tim, who was in the end much improved by his visit to the hospital, we felt we had come through "swimming", as the saying is.

In a few days the Library was doing business as usual, but in an improved order and system that continued until the state of my health, largely due to the effects of this fire, made it necessary for me to leave the happy work.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DREAM STREET OF SOMERS TOWN

WHEN I first took up my residence at 13 Johnson Street, I was resolved that the course of my life, my needs, the time of getting up and going to bed, should be in no way different from the custom of the neighbourhood, in order that I might feel the rhythm of the community's pulse. Indeed, the heavy demands, which I was happy to have so real a work lay upon me, rendered my personal finances in keeping with the situation in which I found myself. The comfort, and even luxury, of a slum had never struck me in all my experience with Somers Town before.

The room in which I was sleeping, it will be remembered, was the room once inhabited by Charles Dickens. "A small chamber on the top floor at the back, sparsely furnished, and stencilled all over in a design which my young imagination fancied was a blue muffin". The design was not apparent, but my imagination was still young enough to fancy it. The little basket-grate, surmounted by a miniature mantelshelf, was as Dickens had left it, as was also the window with its twelve unequal panes of glass, several of which had to be renewed after the fire. Where "C. D."

placed his bed, I am, of course, not sure, but remembering my experience with the draught between door and window, I take it we both finally chose the far side of the room from the window. My own decorations, there being no blue muffins on the plain buff walls, were certain head-hunter's trophies, presented to me in the East, a pewter communion set, used on my very-great-grandfather's American estate in the Jerseys, some time in the seventeenth century—I had myself used it on a convoy bringing American troops to England —my university degrees and a few personal pictures. My bed stood as I have indicated, opposite the door, and on the other side of the hearth stood a wheel-back chair. More than that, there was room only for a small cupboard and a leather trunk, which had been rescued from the ground floor after the tide had subsided on the night of the fire.

Early in the morning the trumpeting of a full orchestra of chanticleers gave the sweet delusion of a real barn-yard, associated in my mind with an extensive farm where my grandparents had preferred to remain after the unpleasantness of 1776, situated in that gentle country through which Yonge Street makes its 100-mile journey north of Toronto. But a cup of strong tea and a glance out of the window disclosed the fact of a ruined timber-yard, whose charred uprights remained standing like gaunt trees after a forest fire. There was nothing of the homely aspect of a barn-yard or of any place for that matter. Even

the chickens, whose crowing died away each time in a melancholy tone, were never to be seen outside of their small boxes, and yet above the dull backs of houses one saw the church spire clumped about by the tops of trees in Oakley Square, to which I have referred as reminiscent of the green fields of Dickens' time.

And even the timber-yard, which seems to have lain behind Johnson Street from the earliest days of Somers Town, viewed from the height of my window, looked expansive and suggestive of open country. When Dickens writes "A bed and bedding was sent over for me" (from the Marshalsea) "and made up on the floor", he doubtless indicates his lodging in Lant Street. But in continuing, "The little window had a pleasant prospect of a timber-yard; and when I took possession of my new abode, I thought it was Paradise", he so describes my own experience on first taking up residence in his old Johnson Street room, that I feel he may likely have transferred his Somers Town impressions to the Borough across the river.

I do not know what Dickens did for a bath. The only water in Johnson Street to-day comes from taps in the backyards, although we improved on this at No. 13 by placing a tank in the little attic and a sink beside a small gas cooker on the top landing. This combined to furnish me sufficient hot water to enjoy a bath beside the open fire, which together with the "early tea", I counted the beginning of a luxurious day.

My morning's work of writing letters, letters, letters, and receiving an equal number of letters asking why I never wrote, was only interrupted by certain professional duties. There were many charming accompaniments which I could hardly regard as interruptions. The easy life of the street was a constant joy which often took me to one of the front windows. It has been noted that the cries of vendors are disappearing from London streets. Indeed, in the "West End" the signs still remain prohibiting the criers, but there seldom appears a soul with a desire to break the law in this respect. In Johnson Street there will always be cries. The neighbourhood demands them as a wood in spring demands the notes of birds.

What a sight to see a man pushing a barrow of tiny oranges, whose shining skins radiate the warmth of Italian skies, and shouting for joy at the excellence of his fruit. The yellow spheres will have been arranged with the assistance of the children at the top of the street so that the entire glory of the juicy fruit is displayed. And if he cries well—and only if he does it well and with a good heart—the windows open at his coming. This calls for further skill, since questions are sure to be "aimed at him" from the points of vantage, and to bring down his game, he must reply with an instantaneous counter-fire. Then down they come, sometimes I think with a guilty feeling, to pay for the chance of venting their wit in public, so that before he has gone far, the

orange vendor returns, whistling to the rattle of his empty barrow. What a healthy habit Somers Town has in the eating of oranges. Perhaps it is cheap. But any habit that is not healthy is expensive.

The salt and vinegar man was a friend of mine, who always had a word to exchange with me although I never bought of his wares. The huge white lumps of salt, which were piled beside the scales on his barrow, reminded me of those lumps one finds in a stable manger, yet it was not rock-salt, for it could be pulverized readily. The keg, which balanced their weight at the other end of the barrow, was said to contain vinegar. That cloudy liquid which was responsible for the pungent quality in the smell of Johnson Street—I hasten to note that any street that has been robbed of its smell, has lost its living quality—was sure to draw a cluster of women in costumes, which showed they had not expected the cry of salt and vinegar to come so soon. They would stand contentedly gossiping while the vinegar trickled into their long-necked bottles. But books have been written on street cries, so that all I need to say is that they, most of them, have their welcome turn in Johnson Street. Such a vendor as the milkman, whose commodity requires a freshness to satisfy the critical taste we have developed in Johnson Street, would be welcomed with his great can on wheels hung about with jingling measures, two or three times each day. I feel sure people enticed him around, through buying their milk in small

quantities, in order to hear the sound of his cry, which has all the melody and appeal of the cow herself. I might add here, since other writers are probably more delicate in their feeling in the matter than I have learned to become during my residence in Somers Town, that the good old remedies that have never been supplanted by Keating's powder, are hawked in the most inviting way and receive a popular and humorous welcome. I often wondered how far one of these insect-destroying barrows could be pushed through the West End. There are some of these cries to which I have listened with the strained concentration with which one tries to catch the news shouted occasionally by paper-sellers through the streets. But not only have I failed to discover by listening to their inarticulate expression and by observing these persons, but further I have not learned, after many inquiries in the neighbourhood, what was intended by their appealing cries. These are like some preachers whose appealing voice attracts crowds of listeners, but whose message is so vague and inarticulate that their congregations carry away no more than they bring.

This brings to my mind an unkempt individual who could be found around the corner, at regular times during the week, practising the art to which, on Sundays, he gave vent in Hyde Park. Although he shouted and gesticulated at great length, even the children knew he was merely practising, and left him alone thrusting home truths into vacant spaces!

To return, the morning's shopping in Johnson Street was done in this luxurious way of having the salesmen call with their goods. There was a fruit-stall at either end of the street, and an old-fashioned sweet-shop in the middle which displayed its wares in a row of glass bottles behind the square panes of the big window. In Dickens' day the front of the house directly across the way from where he lived had been built out with a large bay-window of wood, supported by two legs from the pavement. Here, probably, could be seen the coffin plates of the recently deceased members of the community, as they can still be seen in a most up-to-date shop in a nearby street, for it was here that Little Dorrit's father presided over "the undertaking" of Johnson Street. I remember speaking of 13 Johnson Street to the present local proprietor of this important business—a man who has by heart more of Dickens than I have read—and having him say in an off-hand manner after carefully figuring what number it was: "Of course, I know the house well. I have buried a person from every room in it". As it is, there merely remains the outline of where the old undertaker's shop-window was, for its place has been taken by an ordinary window matching its neighbours in the street.

There must here be mentioned the markets, which although they offered an excellent chance at bargaining, were more to be compared with a Chelsea flower show or a Governor's Island garden party, except they happened with weekly regularity

throughout the year. There was the great square just across the Hampstead Road, where the market was interrupted by a fair which came at least once a year. The Cattle Market—not on cattle days, but on Fridays, when odds and ends without end were spread over the pavements to the delectation of the crowds of people who wandered about, observing with delight how cheaply they might buy things other people were paying heavily for in the Tottenham Court Road if they had had the money—had a decided attraction. We of Somers Town were great supporters of this neighbourly market on the other side of Camden Town. In fact, if you could afford no more than the penny tram ride, it would be worth it to see all your friends, with few exceptions, either buying or selling in the best of holiday moods. However, to find this sort of thing at its height, you must arrive early on a Sunday morning in Petticoat Lane and make your way through two continuous rows, lining the streets for blocks, until you reach the end of Brick Lane, which abounds in cats and dogs and chickens for sale. Here the Cockney buys, or at any rate swells the admiring crowd, while the Jew sells. Here come Lascars and strange members of ship's crews from many a distant port in England to enjoy a Sunday's leave on shore. Somers Town is here, but then so is everybody else who can call himself a Londoner.

And so it was, to return from market to the day's life in Somers Town, except for fresh eggs, or meat, or some special delicacy for the midday

meal, which was the dinner of the day, Johnson Street busied itself indoors in the mornings if left at home at all.

There was a rush of hungry children from the Medburn School at the foot of Johnson Street, which broke in upon the easiness of each morning. In the few minutes before dinner and after, I invariably had excited talks with these youngsters about the great things which had been achieved at school that morning without the teacher's knowledge. But then would come the one o'clock bell, and as though it had been the pipes of the pied musician of Hamelin, the children would tear down the street and disappear into the silence of the school, which rose like a mountain above our two-story houses. For two or three hours after dinner there would come a quiet time in Johnson Street that might have reminded one of siesta time in Hong Kong. I do not think our people slept, as they do where the midday heat is too oppressive. There was never much meditating. Their clothes showed no sign of constant sewing. I do not know what they did, but what they did not do made it the pleasantest hour of the day. It gave one the opportunity of letting oneself back a century to the time of the quiet, unpaved side-street and the small villas, which had once formed the boundary-line of the town.

Then, as the afternoon awakened, the entertainers began their rounds. Perhaps some lone individual, with a voice which so suited the agony of a popular composition of acute sentiment that

you could not help admiring the fitness of its quality and expression, would stroll melodiously through the street. Sometimes an enterprising quartet, covered from cap to boot in the iridescence of pearl buttons, the product of a local industry which facilitated the preservation of the traditional gala dress of the Cockney, would appear with an upright piano mounted in a cart. Occasionally a kilted Scotchman would tramp up and down our street with his bagpipes and his cheeks puffed out, to the astonishment of the inhabitants.

There was a distinct rivalry, I remember, between a Punch and Judy show, which would set up its curtained booth at a convenient place in the street, and certain marionettes which were jerked up and down on the floor of an open wagon by means of musical machinery. The crowd which gathered around these attractions were prone to buy the green apples impaled on sticks and dipped in toffee. Such popular shows as these generally appeared after half-past four, when the streets were again filled with children.

CHAPTER IX

DAVID COPPERFIELD'S LIBRARY

EVERY day at five o'clock the children would begin to gather round the Library door, for they knew there was no chance of entrance before then. This was a rule I thought best to insist on, since I found children, in order to be sure of a place in the Library, would omit their evening meal and come directly from school. Also there was my own tea, and this was allowed to stand as an excuse for the rule. So it was understood that the Library would be open after I finished tea.

When this much-expected time arrived, I would appear at the front door in a smock, the sort of loose brown-linen covering that is used by artists in their studios, for indeed it was in that spirit that I took my work as Librarian. The crowd that surged round the door, was conscious of being too large to fit the house, so that the excited shouts of everybody who had the smallest suspicion of being left out, were almost deafening.

But they soon came to know that there were twenty boys and girls who formed the "staff". For these the pack of children would make way without question. An offence to one of those powerful members of their juvenile society might

prevent one's admission. Once the staff was admitted the door was closed, and the crowd knew another five or ten minutes must elapse before it was again opened.

The staff, having washed and donned holland smocks cut after the pattern of my own but of smaller size, went at once to their places to await the inrush of readers. During this interval, in fact during the rest of the afternoon, one of the greatest of trials was the loud beat of the ancient knocker, so that it was necessary to assign one of the staff known as " Doorknocker " to ameliorate this nuisance. " Doorknocker " accomplished this by bribing some stout youngster with eventual admission if he would remain outside with one hand on the knocker and the other defending his position. This he would do as though he were a criminal seeking " sanctuary " at the entrance of Durham Cathedral. It was the " Master of Keys " who finally opened the door. He stood in the passage-way with a huge bunch of keys that locked and unlocked the various doors and cupboards in the house, although, as a matter of fact, one key answered for all our locks. The " Master " with his assistant, " Watchkey," counted the incoming readers, and when the proper number had passed in they shut the door, always with difficulty, but always with the understanding that when anyone went out, another should be admitted to take his place.

All the readers at once passed to the wash-room provided by the extension at the back of the house.

There the smocks, some of blue and some of buff, some large and some small, hung around the walls like the wives of Blue Beard. There were also wash-basins which on a cold day would be filled with warm water drawn from the old *Christmas Carol* copper in the backyard. The room was presided over by the "Master-of-Robes" and his assistants, "Soap" and "Towel," whose duty it was to see that all hands and faces were clean and all the raggedy little bodies enveloped in smocks. Whether or not it was the heavy scent of the soap, the attraction for washing was so great that care had to be taken to prevent the children from having a second wash when they came down from reading. As for smocks, I told the children on the first day that I planned to put them in brown covers in order that I might take the brown covers off the books. This appealed to them, and when they saw the idea carried out by the larger smocks provided for visitors who might come to read to them, they were without exception only too happy to dress like artists, boys and girls wearing the same sort of smock. It perhaps served the inverse purpose to the artist's smock, for it kept the library, with its precious books and pictures, from being soiled by the necessarily filthy clothes; although I must modify this by the note that some of the poorest children were always spotlessly clean. The smock soon came to have the smartening effect of a uniform, which prepared the children for the business of reading. And further, the æsthetic value of the beautiful house, instead of being lessened by

the dull clothes in which the children were often pinned, was greatly enhanced by the pleasing colour of the smocks. Finally, all the value of encouraging a democratic community feeling, which is necessary in the proper pursuit of reading and which a college gown is apt to help, was furnished through these small smocks made with great care as exact copies of the professional models.

There were very small smocks made for babies who would be sure to be brought in with older brothers and sisters. It was one of the tragedies of child-life in Somers Town, that the boy or girl arriving home from school enthused with a reactionary desire to do something, would find a tired mother who had been troubled with a crying baby during her day's work and was anxious to get free from her charge for a few hours. In this way the older child would be sent out to enjoy himself in the street with an albatross in the form of a baby hung about his neck, and as with "Alice," even though the baby might have been wished on him by a "Duchess," it would soon seem to acquire the demanding qualities of a pig. And yet, in spite of the baby's being a prevention to so many joys, the young guardian showed an affectionate care which was extraordinary. Lest this admirable sense of responsibility might be weakened, we—and from henceforth the staff must be included as part guilty for the making as well as the carrying out of our Library plans—decided upon a repository for "minded ones". We called it the "Fairy Dungeon" and placed it in charge of the "Warder-

of-the-Dungeon," a quick-witted girl who changed from being the *enfant terrible* of Johnson Street to a person of usefulness and self-respect, and two assistants, the "Giant" and the "Fairy". The room which served this purpose so admirably being in the centre of the ground floor, where there were no steps to fall down and where the outside world could be comfortably shut off, was the room we have described as the Micawbers' kitchen. But now, to better serve its new use, the floor and the wall for a sufficient distance were covered with thick, warm cork-matting so that the babies could dispense with the use of chairs, articles of furniture not only prone to cause accidents and take up room, but also quite out of place in a "Fairy Dungeon." The walls were literally covered with coloured pictures which the Warder and her assistants had cut out and pasted on, and in a double line around the top of the cork dado were the picture postcards of which the homes of Somers Town accumulated not a few, for a picture postcard is a favourite means of keeping people at home in touch, if you chance to be in a job outside London or off on a vacation at Southend or Blackpool. There was a cupboard beside the fireplace, where the Dickens' pots and pans had probably been stored, and now it gloried in a miscellaneous collection of toys, armies of lead soldiers, two tremendous dolls presented by Elsie Janis, and what is most important, an accumulation of tinsel and dress-up stuffs which in the course of the afternoon gave the "Dungeon" the aspect of

being inhabited by real fairies. It was a matter of constant amusement to me, at the end of their afternoon's play, to be called in to witness a dramatic production. To be sure there was as much prompting as though it had been an opera, and the actors were often dismissed in the middle of a sentence, while others were engaged to carry on without interrupting the play. All sorts of things stood for things they were not, and the cluster of children who first took their position with me in the stalls, became so enthusiastic that they generally ended by performing some self-invented "super's" part on the stage, and not infrequently I was myself dragged on to be a giant or a church steeple, so that there was no audience left to watch—all of which things had much to do with the afternoon's enjoyment. Being a dungeon, there was no limit put on the noise and activity of the inmates. There was not a rule of bounds, for being a "Fairy Dungeon," the mystic power of fascination prevented the prisoner's escape.

Into this dungeon the "minded-ones" were herded, so that their elder brothers and sisters could go into other parts of the house and read quietly. It is a great advantage in any community life to have a division between those who cannot be expected to do certain things and those who can. The very fact that the inmates of the "dungeon" could not be expected to read or handle books, so much so that their literary food had to be administered by reading aloud or story telling, made the other children more careful of

their own distinction. They proceeded upstairs to the library proper in the rooms where the Micawbers had kept the blinds pulled down to delude the neighbours. Here they soon came to appreciate as charming a pair of rooms as could be found in London. The world of arts and letters had bent with loving care to give a personal touch to these nicely proportioned rooms on the first floor which the young Charles Dickens had known as "unfurnished."

Opposite the hall door, between the two front windows, was a small cupboard, probably the sort of thing that contained the few books which Charles Dickens treasured, in the very spot where the original cupboard stood. Our little cupboard, not because of its own value or the value of its contents, was raised to the dignity of a shrine, for the reason of its precious association with the boyhood of Charles Dickens. It stood high upon a beautiful secretaire-chest of drawers, which must have been in use a hundred years ago and now served to hold such relics as we were gradually collecting. The bright cotton curtains of the cupboard half disclosed two complete editions of the author's works, one old and another new. Besides these, there was the collection we had started of the books which Dickens read as a boy, in the editions in which he might have read them. There they were enshrined together, the books that marked the beginning and the ending of Dickens' literary endeavour, between those two windows through which sufficient light must, in spite of the boy's

MEMBER OF THE CHILDREN'S STAFF OF THE LIBRARY

family insisting on the "blinds being drawn," have come to illuminate that strange capacity within the soul of a boy who was to become a great public servant. On the top of the cupboard stood several amusing "tobys" of the old characters he had created, and at its base an old brass candlestick and an early argand burner picked up at an old curiosity shop around the corner in Seymour Street.

Over the fireplace, with its original basket-grate and its miniature mantelpiece nicely grained and fluted, we had let into the chimneypiece a large panel done in coloured crayon by Leslie Brooke and covered with glass. It presented the indoor and outdoor life of the children of China in such detailed perfection that anyone who had been to the "Land of the Dragon," even as a visitor, could not fail to be impressed with its power of presenting the atmosphere of the community. This panel, together with five others, had been much desired by the New York Public Library for their palatial children's section in the basement of the Fifth Avenue Library, but certain publishers' complications have prevented the originals of the drawings being taken out of England. The result was that the staffs of some forty children's libraries in the city of New York succeeded in raising sufficient funds between themselves—I understand the subscribers represented everybody between superintendent and floor-sweeper—to purchase these six original panels for David Copperfield's Library. More than that, they sent a delegation to the house

in Johnson Street to see that the drawings were framed and placed as we might desire.

On either side of the panel were two simple black iron gas brackets, which we had made with care to reproduce the original and artistic fixtures used for gas at the beginning of the nineteenth century—few of which originals seem to be extant. To be sure there had been no gas in the house in Dickens' day, nor for that matter in the entire street, while in our day, since there was no electric main running through Johnson Street, it was impossible without much legal procedure and expense to have electricity. The light, however, from these gas brackets, which were copied throughout the house, was all that could be desired.

Below the brackets there rested on the shelf two small frames, one containing a poem written out for us by W. H. Davies, "the tramp poet," and the other protecting an original etching which Claude Shepperson valued as one of his best efforts, together with his letter presenting it to the Library. On either side of the chimneypiece were the original cupboards with their grained panel doors and their mahogany-painted tops. Above these we built in shelves for the out-of-door books on one side and the poetry and fairy lore on the other.

The wall opposite afforded a long, unbroken space where we erected, with the help of a carpenter friend who wanted to do something for the children, a low bookcase of three shelves rising above a cupboard seat which had hinges, and provided a good space for storing magazines. In

the centre of the top shelf stood temporarily a bust of the young Augustus. It was an old copy of the famous Vatican portrait, done with a toga in three colours of marble, which harmonized with the brown tones of its surroundings and gave a dignity to the entire room. I had picked it up in Florence, and it had interested me, aside from its being so good a copy, because the marbles had been taken —" stolen " would have been the legal term—from the piles of discarded marbles remaining after that questionable improvement of Augustus Cæsar's in finding Rome " brick " and leaving it " marble ". There was something in the fact of having the portrait of the young man in the very marble he himself had imported from Asia Minor or thereabouts, that gave a satisfied expression to the bust.

Why this particularly fine-looking young gentleman should preside over our Library, you may ask, although, as with most questions, it shows a deplorable lack of familiarity with the encyclopædia. Many a person has stood in the Library studying that bust, with the final observation that they never would in all the world have thought of " C. D." looking like that. Some day there will be busts and pictures of Dickens about, but as I have indicated, from the very start we had endeavoured to look at the constructing of David Copperfield's Library from Dickens' own point of view, and just naturally the images of himself never appeared in the picture. It seemed sufficient that the whole Library should be a manifestation of his happy personality.

Augustus Cæsar had a distinct value as a link with history, and it was a help to the children to realize that at the time of Christ's birth a normal-looking man, whom it would not be at all surprising to see walking down Johnson Street any afternoon, was at the head of the Roman Empire. One might also have noted the fact that he had founded the first two public libraries in Rome, and since the habit of making children read the classics was probably stronger in those days than it is in our own, there may have been children's libraries, for all we know.

The real value of this bust came from the unexpected result of a curious experiment. I had been impressed with a custom practised by my former head-hunter friends of Luzon, of placing in the centre of their council meetings certain sombre-looking images of men and women. These savages have so keen a sense of the ridiculous that concentration over any length of time is as difficult for them as it is for a room full of Cockney children. But such a profound effect have these images—which must not be misjudged as "gods", for they cannot be said to have any religious significance—that it occurred to me that they might be useful, and accordingly I sent for one. In the meantime, however, I placed temporarily this fine, serious-looking head of the young Augustus among the books, and from frequent observations I am convinced that the marble bust of the serious young man exercised the same influence over my naturally restless readers as the black wooden

images of the head-hunters exercised over their council meetings. On either side of Augustus, two other Leslie Brooke panels, one representing the "Babes in the Wood" and so divided into three pictures that it told the story from start to finish, and the other dealing in the same way with "Dick Whittington," who, like Dickens, came to London as a boy and fought his way against odds until he reached great position, were placed in the wall just above the books.

This pair of rooms was furnished with a dozen small arm-chairs with red plush seats, and four little oak tables that could be easily pushed about. The rough boards of the floor were covered with the best linoleum. The back room, which was readily thrown into the front room by opening back the double doors, had a low bench running along the wall opposite the fireplace and under the back window. This room contained a large number of original sketches especially done for the house by artists well known in England. Over the fireplace hung Raven Hill's "Artful Dodger", G. D. Armour's "Bill Sikes' Dog" and a study of a Fairy which Lewis Baumer had drawn for us while he was ill in bed. Together with these hung the message from the Children's Libraries of New York which had accompanied the panels, and a charming letter which Kate Douglas Wiggin had sent to the children with her books.

One afternoon Mr. E. T. Reed, perhaps the greatest cartoonist of our day, had arrived at 13 Johnson Street with a large frame under his

arm. It was the original sketch of a cartoon that had appeared in the *Bystander* at the time of the Devonshire House revival of Lytton's *Not So Bad As We Seem* in aid of our Library, which he had agreed to present to the Library. In that same spirit which marked all favours done for the Library, Mr. Reed had had it beautifully framed and brought it himself. It now hung to the right of the chimney in the back room. Below this clever cartoon was a group done for us in pencil by Augustus John, the mystic figure of the Master in the midst of modern Billingsgate fishermen, one of whose broad, vulgar backs appeared typically in the foreground. It recalled the bringing of the children as the Master laid His hands upon them. The children, and they were evidently poor children such as came to read in our Library, were done with skill and affection.

To the left of the chimneypiece hung a remarkable colour print of Holman Hunt's "The Light of the World". The artist's widow had presented it to the Library because it had been carefully preserved by her husband as the finest colour reproduction of his much reproduced painting. Mrs. Holman Hunt was anxious for the children to have it, and the children on their side came to love its deep colours and mysterious symbolism. I remember on an occasion when the Library was full of children, the hook supporting this picture of Christ broke, and it fell to the floor with a thud. The children rushed to see the result, and their astonishment at finding that neither the delicate

frame nor the expanse of glass was in the smallest way injured, produced amazed silence. Some boy said, "It's Jesus!" and, awestruck as though it had been a miracle, they stood about until I sent them back to their reading.

I would take the liberty to observe that the course I had adopted of trusting these children as though they were men and women of my own age, was an ever enlightening experience. It was like living in a community where the people had no poses or affectations. The spirit was free from the subtleties of sex. So divorced was our slum from the outside world that no titled creature who might come to visit, no historic character that might be dragged out of the past, not even Charles Dickens himself received the hero-worship of the children until the spirit of his personality took hold upon them.

There was a certain curate of a nearby parish who used to come among the children in a well-intending way, talking to them as he felt they were able to understand. He worked hard in order to have them feel he was their patron saint, but, alas, they thought of him as a patronizing saint. The child seems to have an unblurred vision of things as they are, which when first he begins to mature to manhood, gives him that severely critical attitude and seeming lack of appreciation so difficult for older people to tolerate. But while youth is untouched with age, there is a fine clarity of spirit. It was this that made the atmosphere of the Library full of adventure and surprise. It has been said

that the age of miracles has passed. I would say the age of miracles is constantly passing, as people lose touch with that precious period of their living when every new experience comes as a miracle.

To return to our gallery of original sketches, the wall on which the firelight from the old basket-grate may have danced shadow pictures for Charles Dickens, was hung now with a line that would have attracted a crowd in any exhibition. In the centre hung Alfred Noyes' poem on the Library, whose length he declared he had never realized until he wrote it out to be framed for its place on the wall. One side was H. M. Bateman's inimitable conception of a modern "Oliver Twist" entitled, "The Boy Who Having Read Every Book in David Copperfield's Library, Asks for More", and balancing it on the other side the "Chief Scout's" coloured drawing of a Somers Town girl under which he had written, "*Hullo, Guvenor?* with best wishes of *Robert Baden-Powell*." On the end next the window hung George Morrow's pictorial warning against telling too long a story, while at the end next to the door were two figures done by Frank Reynolds, the best modern illustrator of Dickens, representing Micawber and Copperfield on their way to 13 Johnson Street.

The children valued these original drawings, not for the value they would bring at a sale as the works of well-known artists, but for the intrinsic value of the message each one carried? There was, however, an additional bid for affectation in the fact that they had been especially done for the

house in which they now hung. "Attention," was the secret of Dickens' success. It was the "attention" which the artists had paid the children that made for success of their pictures among their juvenile critics.

There only remains to mention the chief adornment and treasure of these reading-rooms. The books! There is no picture so full of colour, so perfect in details that blend into a harmony of the whole, so exciting to the imagination and yet so restful, in short, so delightfully appealing that one longs to be left alone with it for hours of study and enjoyment, as the picture presented by the backs of many books. Their colour seems to sink beneath the surface as the colour of a fresco, and with it goes the sympathy of the soul, so that one is conscious of being drawn out until all the cramped parts of one's nature unfold and blossom—as, coming suddenly on a great panorama, one breathes deeply and thanks God for His creation. And to the children who read and re-read with increased pleasure, writing with their live imaginations between the lines a hundred words where the author has noted ten, this enjoyment and appreciation is manifold. The backs of children's books—especially a collection such as ours which equalled not in number but in character any that could be collected—were peculiarly enticing. I have taken care to study representative books published for the children of France, Germany, Italy and Spain, and I should like to write more at length on the remarkable way in which they reflect and in the

sense that the language of childhood is universal, interpret the genius of the various peoples. But for the present it must suffice to say that no people can boast a more delightfully presented child literature than the Anglo-Saxon. It is surprising what the English have done, but it is more surprising what the Americans have contributed in the last few years—for it is only in recent years that such emphasis has been laid on the publication of books for children. The enterprise of American publishers has probably been encouraged by the four thousand children's libraries scattered between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The choice Anglo-Saxon books, which as we have noted in the case of the drawings, had the added attraction for the children of having been brought there and left for them by the people who were partly responsible for their making, were to be found in these reading-rooms on the first floor of the Johnson Street house.

As I imagine myself standing before their rows of bright faces, I long to pull them out and show you where the author has inscribed an affectionate word, or the illustrator has sketched an extra figure, or the publisher has pasted an ornamental presentation slip, all just to let the children know that it is a collection that has been drawn together by love and personal regard. But here is no place for me to linger over pictures that never illuminated my own boyhood's reading, nor to refresh your memory of stories that have probably meant more to you than the most learned study of your

" grown-up " life. Enough to bring my description to a close and give the rightful readers the chance at their own treasure.

If I have in any way succeeded in introducing you to our Library, you will have the regretful feeling that it is a pity you ever grew as old and prosaic as you probably have grown. But if you should actually have been walking about in those two rooms on the first floor, you would have felt unconsciously like " Alice " after she drank the contents of the bottle which made her too large for her surroundings. In all my time in the Library I never overcame the feeling that unless I exercised great care, I would step on somebody or something, so that I walked like a Buddhist, conscious of the sacredness of small things living about my path.

The cause of this was the deliberate care with which the size of the child had been taken into account. The plan of the Library had been to make everything as comfortable for children and as uncomfortable for " grown-ups " as possible. The house seemed to have been constructed with that purpose in mind. You would probably have remembered bumping your head on the ceiling as you came upstairs, or at least you would not have escaped the experience on going down. The windows had no real excuse for coming within a foot of the floor more than that they were English windows put in by a French builder, and the dwarfed fireplace with its proportionate hearth and mantelpiece seemed entirely in keeping. The great double doors which opened out the whole parti-

tion between the two rooms, when you came to think of it, were not much larger than a good-sized single door, and yet the customary panels and mouldings were all there. The tiny cornice around the ceiling helped in the deception by reproducing the conventional ridges which probably run around the rooms of your house.

And then, had you observed the arm-chairs scattered through the rooms in perfect proportion with their surroundings and realized that the problem which presented itself to the camel peering through the needle's eye in no way compared with the difficulty you would have had in attempting to sit in one of these chairs, you would have begun to know something was wrong. There could have been no pulling a book *down* from a shelf, for most of the shelves were so low that it would have been necessary for you to stoop to read their titles. The blank walls would have presented themselves to your eyes, while there, far below, would have been hanging the pictures of which I have spoken. Even the gas fixtures jutted out from the wall at so dangerous a height, that you would have avoided them uncomfortably.

I remember calling a meeting of our Executive Committee in the Library just after it had been completed and discovering that in spite of a dozen arm-chairs there was no place for the members to sit down. One giant's chair there was, for which I used to notice visitors made at once in a nervous way. This was the story-teller's throne. It was the chair which Bransby Williams had used for his

Dickens interpretation at one of the Library benefit performances. But lest you might have lost your sense of proportion in these dwarfed surroundings, burst into tears like "Alice" and once again flooded our Library as on the night of the fire, I would have suggested leaving the children to read under the supervision of the "Master of Books" while we investigated the Micawbers' parlour downstairs in the front.

It is interesting to note how the "Master of Books" managed, for in spite of the assistants, "Historian," "Story Teller," "Poet," etc., the care of open shelves meant hard work after the last reader had departed. Had you noticed carefully, you would have seen the various titles of the staff printed on the shelves marking sections of about fifty books for each name. These fifty books or so were the responsibility of the staff member whose name was inscribed below them. A full dress parade was scheduled for each night at which their particular staff member inspected them, noting absences, untidy uniforms and all the other possible lapses in perfection, which from my own "Tommy-experience" in the late war I can remember inspecting officers looking hard to discover. By this means of careful checking-up each night we knew how it fared with the books from day to day. It was extraordinary that in a neighbourhood where petty theft is an art, with no supervision as to what came or went among our books, many of which would have sold for a pound round the corner, *not a single book was stolen,* or to use the

local word that more describes the spirit in which such an action would have been committed, "*pinched*." No one was more full of anxious warning, however, than the mothers and fathers of Johnson Street, saying that their neighbour's children were not to be trusted.

I can think of no instance of the mishandling of a volume. As might have been expected, the clean hands and smocks left no possibility of finger prints or coat-sleeve smudges. Even in one's own private library, not being prepared as a surgeon in an operating room (which is hardly more than the preparation to which children subjected themselves) one is apt to punish the pages of a much read book. There is a superstition that dust is necessary for the atmosphere of a library, just as filth is necessary for a proper existence of pigs, but in both cases the superstition is false.

One last glance at the happy reading-room. The sun streaming through the old square-paned windows tinted slightly by an occasional section of stained glass inserted by the local branch of the Dickens Fellowship and designed by John Wimbolt to represent a child character from the Dickens' stories. The deep blue of long *portières* and the buff of short casement curtains softening the glare. The neutral colours of the walls against which the lines of gay books stand out. And everywhere the busy figures of clean-faced boys and girls, in loose smocks of blue and buff, with their opened books or searching the shelves for new treasures. In the midst of all, the shrine between the two

front windows, behind whose bright curtains lurk the few books that Dickens read as a boy, together with the many he wrote as a man. One cannot help recalling with some emotion the expression of Sir Henry Dickens when this vision was first presented to him. "How proud and delighted my father would have been if he could have known that the history of his early life was to be used as a means of helping poor, neglected children, and giving them opportunities which as a child he never had."

In finally bringing you to the Micawbers' parlour on the first floor I must explain that this was known as the "Wigwam". It took its name from the Indian tent which Leslie Brooke drew into his panel of "The Children of Canada", then over the fireplace in that room. Its purpose was as a "silence room" into which older boys and girls could withdraw for the uninterrupted enjoyment of a long story. You will probably remember if you have ever been a child, that up to a certain age the distraction of other people in a room asking questions or moving about never interrupted the concentration of your reading. But then there came a time when, like Dickens, you desired to get off by yourself. To meet that critical moment in a reader's development this "Wigwam" was designed. The "Big Chief", the responsible boy in the "Wigwam", who seldom received his full title of "Sitting Bull", was an overgrown lad afflicted with sleeping sickness. He was unable to stand for more than a few moments at a time,

but sitting quietly by the fire with a book in his hands and never speaking, as was his wont, he served in a quiet way that Milton would well have appreciated.

The fireplace, about which the circle of silent readers gathered like the impassive aborigines of America, gave evidence of the care with which we preserved the original character of the house. The coals glowed steadily through the iron bars of the ancient basket, while the fact that the heat was furnished by gas was completely hidden by having the feeding pipe run down beneath the hearthstone until it reached the interior of one of the cupboards beside the chimney, where it was secretly turned on, and known only to the staff.

In this room were two more panels such as we have been describing, one depicting the "Children of Russia", not as they are, but as they were before the disaster, and as we hope they will be in time to come, and the other the "Children of India". Besides serving as a quiet room, the "Wigwam" was planned to contain the tribute from foreign Governments of their best children's books. It is a strange thing, that although Dickens remains supreme in his own kingdom as represented by such a community as Somers Town—this is evident from the fact that the old book dealers in the neighbourhood can never keep a Dickens book on their stalls for more than a day at a time—the great bulk of so-called "educated" people fail to derive inspiration from Dickens, for the reason, I fear we must admit, that

they seldom read him. This is quite the opposite with people on the Continent.

I remember at a large banquet that was given by the Lyceum Club in honour of our Library, the tables were filled with foreign admirers of the novelist, and judging by our own response from Italians, Spaniards, Americans, Germans and Frenchmen, it would seem that the homage denied Dickens at home is doubly accorded abroad. The French Government was the first to send its tribute, not alone because of their love for Dickens, however, but as the Minister of Foreign Affairs put it, because of the instructive character of children's libraries. Of the presentation of this valuable gift, which occupied the shelves opposite the "Wigwam" door, we will have more to say later.

And so, midst all those treasures where the only rule was that they should be *used* by the children with something more than the utilitarian spirit with which you might use stepping-stones to get you on in life, for there were many school books available for that purpose, the afternoon was well spent. An occasional visitor might have come in, such as Miss Marie Shedlock, whose story telling made her "Fairy Godmother" to our Library, just as she is to the children's libraries in America and France, but as a rule no one ever troubled to help or hinder, so that the books and the children were left to work together. It is well to note that at the request of the schools in the vicinity we started the idea of having a master bring a group of boys

or girls for a morning session in the Library, allowing them to use the books in the same individual way as was the custom after school hours, and by such means we were able to accommodate a great number during the course of a day in a comparatively small space. But usually there was nothing to interrupt the precious quality of the Library's belonging only to the children.

Until nine o'clock the Library remained crowded every night I was able to keep it open. The numbers of children that made Johnson Street such a delightful place were too great for our "No. 13". Nor could I find excuses of inattention or restlessness whereby I might lessen the crowd inside and so relieve the patient little group at the street door. I have often come down and found children waiting in the rain outside for two or three hours in the hope of being admitted for a few minutes before the Library closed. When closing time came, any reader who wished to place a marker inscribed with his name in a book, was allowed to reserve that book until the following evening by locking it away in a cupboard. The more we tried out the practice of not allowing any book to leave the building, the more we understood its wisdom and the more the children of Johnson Street appreciated the value of their reading place apart.

After the "Master of Books" was satisfied that the volumes were in order, and the "Master of Robes" had seen all the "wives of Blue Beard" safely hung on their pegs in the wash-room, and the "Gardener"—for we had a garden of Dickens'

favourite flowers and window boxes too—had watered the plants, and after the " Warder of the Fairy Dungeon " had put all the playthings away, the " Master of Keys " locked everything except the " Wigwam " where the entire staff of twenty gathered around the open fire. The " Star Lighter " having extinguished all lights except that which glowed from the basket-grate, we held a serious meeting of five minutes in which it was regularly decided that the readers were quite unworthy of their " Staff ", and then we proceeded to sing away our troubles. The " Songster " was completely in control of the " singsong," and should anyone fail to sing or play a mouth organ, or in some way demonstrate his devotion to the charms of Orpheus, he was without further question hurled into the street. The " singsong " lasting a half-hour served to draw the boys and girls together and sent them home forgetting the strenuousness of the evening's work. Following the strain of the daily session, I regularly lay down on my back with my eyes closed for half an hour. The anxiety of the experiment I had placed myself to test, kept me nervously tense without my being conscious of the effort. Nevertheless supper at 9.30 put me on my feet again, and I often would go out to post a bundle of letters before bedtime.

Somers Town after the public-houses closed was for a time a bit terrifying. What people do either because they are drunk, or under the excuse of being drunk, is never pleasing to relate. One man had been killed in a street fight in Johnson Street,

and one of the few policemen I ever saw alone there at night, was so badly stoned by women that he had to be taken away in an ambulance. The worst scenes, and they occurred daily, were the female disputes. I have stood with other men helpless on the outside of a mob of ten or fifteen screaming women, clawing each others' faces and dragging each other round the street by their hair. Nothing can possibly stop such a fight but physical exhaustion. Generally these fights were confined to two or three combatants, but they were not pleasant. I remember one of my " staff " being knocked down outside of our house and kicked in the face until he bled, by his mother. This I did interfere with, but then she was a well-spoken woman when she was sober, and her son seemed to have been brought up to understand. And yet they were not all drunk. The minstrels played about the doors of the tavern in our street until it was shut, and the children had their games in the light from its big windows. And farther up the street a cloud of foul-smelling steam rolled out of a fried-fish shop. I say foul smelling, because, if you have never stood on a corner picking the delicate white flesh of some sort of fish from among the soggy fried potatoes which lie concealed in the folds of a bit of greasy newspaper, and enjoyed it, you would probably fail to understand the pungent vinegar and oil smell of this classic Cockney delicacy as anything but foul. Like a package of cheap cigarettes, it is the sociable sort of delicacy that can be afforded and accepted without much

obligation, and I am much indebted personally to such service rendered by "fish and potatoes" for the beginnings of many precious friendships in Somers Town.

CHAPTER X

TINY TIM'S TRIBUTE TO DICKENS

THE juvenile staff, which came more and more to administer to the needs of David Copperfield's Library until I was myself able to sit in a corner and read without distraction, drew the attention not only of important older people, but also of the children in distant parts of the world. This attention came so naturally and could so well be attributed to the other boy, Charles Dickens, that the children came to take it as a matter of course that many times during the week photographers would call to obtain a group-picture of the readers in their smocks, busy with the books of their treasure house, or that reporters would stop officials of the Library, whom they might have found in the course of the afternoon playing marbles along the gutters of Johnson Street or whirling in a dangerously hilarious circular-swing, constructed by means of ropes attached well up on one of the lamp posts in Johnson Street, the loose ends of the rope being fastened securely around the little bodies of the children, so that at a given signal they could all hurl themselves in the same direction and continue flying around the solid "maypole" until the winding ropes bound them close

to the iron post. A favourite post for this swing, which stood uncomfortably near the iron fence at the top of our "block", was at other times used as "wicket" in cricket practice, although there was little danger of the "wicket" being dislodged. The post did, of course, serve to light that end of the street at times.

To older people it seemed an enigma that children who could go to such extremes in being "what one must expect of children" in the street, could assume responsibilities such as "one would never expect of children" in the managing of David Copperfield's Library. To other children, however, there could be no mystery in this, merely a delight that some children were being given responsibilities that they must have known they could themselves have carried if they had ever been given the chance. There were, for instance, a group of crippled children drawn together in that remarkable institution known as the Rhinelander School of New York. There, as in the Copperfield Library, the art of trusting children was being proved with happy results. I remember, on carrying a message from our staff to these children in New York, being greeted with a production of *Christmas Carol*, which moved me as much as any dramatic performance I have ever witnessed. The simple costumes and scenery and the signs hung out for further instruction of the audience in good Shakespearean fashion were all the work of the children, while the dramatization of the "Carol" itself, whose whole spirit lives about the immortal

character of "Tiny Tim", when enacted by happy children, all of whom were crippled for life, became intensified to an extraordinary degree.

It was these crippled children of the Rhinelander School who wrote to the children of David Copperfield's Library and said that if some of the crippled readers of the Library would go to Westminster Abbey on June 9th—this was in 1922—they would send a wreath of flowers for them to lay on Charles Dickens' grave, because that happened to be the day on which he died, and what was more, they promised that the wreath should be of the geraniums which Dickens always loved to have around him. The immediate reply to this from the English children was that it should be done if the American children could get the wreath over. There had been a long account in the papers, which certain of our staff remembered, of how a wreath had been sent over for the Unknown Warrior's grave frozen in a solid block of ice, and the question as to how we could get the flowers out and what the verger or the policeman at the Abbey might say when he saw a few not-over-dressed youngsters dragging a huge cake of ice into Westminster Abbey was a serious one! It was decided, nevertheless, that if the American children were smart enough to get the wreath to Johnson Street, the Cockney child could furnish the wits for smuggling it into the Abbey in some way.

The day arrived when a delivery van stopped before the door of the Library with a large case

from the Rhinelander School. There was always a holding of breath when anything as unusual as that happened in Johnson Street, for none of the houses in our poor street were accustomed to receiving their necessities or extravagances by such means. The delivery men themselves needed some convincing that the wrong address had not been attached to their goods before they would deign to turn down our way from Seymour Street. I remember an incident happening to one of the Royal governesses who, in desperation of finding something to carry her home from the theatre one night, had hailed the driver of an old cab. On receiving his instruction to drive to Buckingham Palace, he looked at his "fare" suspiciously for a moment and then explained that he was not in the habit of taking people to such unfamiliar parts. The lady *walked*, if I remember correctly. When the delivery men discovered our Library in the unfamiliar street and learned that it was housed in the former home of Charles Dickens, they behaved with all the surprise of finding a long-lost brother. They had, with few exceptions, become familiar with the house through reading some Dickens story, and often asked for the privilege of seeing the interior with all its library treasures.

So the wreath arrived, not in a block of ice, but carefully protected beneath many coverings. When finally the tissue paper was lifted there was disclosed in all its brilliance of deep green and bright scarlet a circle of flowers which seemed to have been caught by fairy magic and made ever-

lasting without losing the freshness of their bloom, for so marvellously had the crippled children across the water made these flowers that it was hard to believe, without close inspection, they were not real. This seemed to make up for their not arriving in the expected block of ice, and certainly it was agreed by the staff that the fact of the flowers being paper made the problem of carrying them into the Abbey much easier.

The newspaper reporters, who by this time had made permanent friends among the Library children, had been around to talk over the plans for the anniversary celebration of Dickens' death, and altogether there had been keen excitement over the wreath until the eventful ninth arrived. The "Tiny Tim" of our Library was to be accorded the honour of actually placing the flowers on the grave and the "Master of Keys", together with the "Master of Books", were to act as sturdier supports in place of the little cripple's own distorted legs. The rest of the children, at the set time, did their part in summoning a taxi. With the two "staff officers" holding "Tiny Tim", and "Tiny Tim" holding the wreath so that everybody might behold its gorgeous colour, we drove in state through Johnson Street and so to Westminster Abbey.

Our entrance was through the gates of that sequestered square known as "Dean's Yard", across which one passes to the old homes of the former citizens of the City of Westminster. In one corner of the yard we alighted and dismissed

the taxi man, who looked much as though he would have preferred to come along with us, and made our way to the Deanery. Our excitement had made us a bit early so that we sat there on the stone bench in the "dark cloister", looking across the open space to the forest of flying buttresses, which are like so many supporters of the church in general, who find it the extent of their duty to remain *outside*. A little crowd gathered about asking questions and expressing interest. Finally the moment came for the Dean to be freed from a committee meeting. I remember the venerable Bishop Ryle, for he was Dean of Westminster at the time, came down the steps leading from the Jerusalem Chamber as our "Tiny Tim", carried on the shoulders of his bodyguard and holding firmly to the great wreath, approached. The camera men were about, as was evident from the papers the following day, but the dramatic nature of our mission kept the children's minds on the tribute they were about to pay. Through what the children felt was a secret passage-way we passed into the great monastic temple.

Have you ever come suddenly upon a magic grove hollowed out of the leafy denseness of a forest? I can remember discovering one by myself as a child. Huge trees, so much larger than the other trees of the wood, seemed to spread their arms as a warning to smaller growth lest it should trespass on the secret precincts, so that there was nothing but a matting of luxuriant ferns and deep moss on the floor of the great open space

except where prostrate giants of the forest lay like long benches to accommodate worshippers in the sacred grove. Nor did the warders of the grove stand in the formless order of the trees about, but arranged themselves in definite plan as though they served as the columns of some majestic temple. At one end, where a deep pool nestled under the steep slope of a sudden hill, a wide cleft in the sandy soil reached from the sunshine of somewhere above to dip its burning sand in the cool water of the pool. Often at midday, looking up among the autumn-tinted leaves which roofed this cavern, it seemed to me the sun came with rainbow colours through myriad windows to discover the gnarled trunks among the ferns, grouped like fantastic figures to commemorate the spirits of mighty trees that had passed away, while a constant choir of feather-vested birds chanted somewhere in the hidden vastness of the place.

Into such a grove as this the two children, bearing their precious burden, entered like "babes in the wood" through the small door near the west end of Westminster Abbey's spacious nave. They made their way with all the wonder of discovery, for it was the first time they had dared to look into the historic church, along the path that leads up on the right beside the ordered columns to where the transept juts out to form the symbol of Christ. Here they found assembled a large gathering which had been warned by the watchful Press and had come to witness, if not to take some part in this fitting tribute. It was as natural

that people should gather in this wondrous grove of Gothic columns, lighted by coloured rays from the stained glass windows, as that gnomes should crowd the fallen trees in the sacred hollow of the forest, and the children continued through the opening that the aisle afforded to where, among the many monuments to England's poets, a slab lay marked with the name of CHARLES DICKENS.

The resting-place, towards which the children had been making their pilgrimage, had been chosen by the famous Dean Stanley. Opposite stood the monuments of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dryden, those three immortals who had wrought the language with which Dickens had worked with consummate skill, and directly behind his grave rested the body of David Garrick, the great interpreter of that dramatic art which formed such an essential part of Dickens' nature. Nor was Dean Stanley's prophecy that "the spot would be henceforth a sacred one with both the New World and the Old, as that of the representative of the literature not of this island only, but of all who speak our English tongue", unfulfilled, for piled high around this simply engraved stone were the floral tributes from individuals and organizations throughout the world.

Bishop Ryle had brought the children to the shrine and, after giving instructions that they were to be allowed to remain after the crowd had been sent away for the closing of the Abbey at six, he disappeared. The people seemed loath to go when the hour came, and as the newspapers noted, before

they left, a poor woman placed a small bunch of white sweet peas, bearing no name, among the elaborate garlands of roses and lilies about the grave. She was the mother of a lad in Johnson Street.

For some the impressiveness of the national sanctuary reaches its height when it is massed with worshippers or banked with spectators at a Coronation, but for us, after everybody had departed, leaving us, two or three gathered together alone in that spirit building which had long been "the home of God", nothing could add to the impressiveness of the scene. The colours of the great oriel window in the transept opposite deepened in the dusk of the dying day and shadows moved among the marble groups along the walls. No sounds from the busy square outside penetrated the grey barriers which cut us off from the world as they had cut off the monks of old.

At a few minutes past the hour, the moment for which we had waited in silence, the steps of the Dean were heard coming toward us, and on the anniversary of the very moment when the life-loving spirit of Charles Dickens left his earthly body with that pathetically resigned phrase, "On the ground", we stood about his grave while the Dean expressed in sincere prayer the thoughts of our hearts. As our "Tiny Tim" laid the gay wreath, which had been the work of the loving hands of the crippled children across the ocean, on the grey slab inscribed with the name of the boy of Johnson Street, it seemed that the spirit

of Dickens gathered the flowers to his heart and the children all over the world with them.

Our little band, led by Bishop Ryle and bearing the crippled child, retraced its steps down the nave of the Abbey towards where the "Unknown Soldier" lies buried, and just as it reached the "Old Baptistery" it turned again through the small doorway to the Jerico Parlour, the panelled ante-room of that ancient apartment of the Abbots of Westminster known as the "Jerusalem Chamber", probably because it was once hung with tapestries representing the history of the Holy City. There were other tapestries hanging in their places and the portrait of Richard II, the oldest contemporary portrait of any English monarch. Here, in this cedar-panelled room, where Henry IV had died in 1413 with the happy satisfaction that the prophecy of his breathing his last breath in Jerusalem had not been altogether falsified, where the Westminster Assembly had held solemn conclave in 1649 and where the revisers of the Bible, two centuries later, had accomplished their great task, a plum cake was waiting for the juvenile pilgrims. The Dean cut generous slices, until there was no more demand from the children, which meant much, for such a cake was not to be tasted often in Johnson Street. And finally, after an expression of thanks and appreciation from all, we made our way down the stone steps into the Abbot's Courtyard and home to Johnson Street, where the expectant crowd awaited the news of our adventure.

CHAPTER XI

THE BIG VISITORS

THE excursions which the children of David Copperfield's Library made into the land of the "great" were not to be compared with the excursions which the "great" made into the land of Somers Town. The simple house, which played such a vital part in the development of Charles Dickens, combined with the unique use to which we had put it, acted as a lodestone to draw men and women from their busy and luxurious homes. There was that genuine retiring lady who held in her own name the title and fortune of "the grand old pioneer of Canada". Her car had stopped before the door on the occasion of the first Christmas party. So large and elegant a motor had never before rolled down Johnson Street. I can see it now, surrounded by the multitude of children who were waiting for their turn at the party whenever the departing guests might make room for them. As the little lady stepped out, her mourning veil almost hiding her kindly smile, the children made way, not too much way, but just enough for her to get through, for they were sensitive to the spirit of loving consideration which my

own experience had taught me to recognize so well in everything she did.

There was another equipage that made a more stirring effect on the neighbourhood when it drew up at our Library months later, because it was more truly Dickensian. It was a coach with two beautiful horses and two wonderful men on the box, costumed in such smart livery that even at Hyde Park Corner people would have peered through the window, if it had been the correct thing to do, to discover the distinguished owner. Moreover, it drove up and down Johnson Street for some time so that there was ample opportunity to inspect the "high hats", with cockades stuck in their gold bands and the gold and red trimmings on the buff uniforms, which ended in the most shiny high boots one can possibly imagine, for the lady, who had been seen for a minute as she disappeared behind the door marked "No. 13", stopped for tea. She was the lady of whom I once heard a great international financier say: "She is the noblest woman I have ever known", and her title took one back to the days of Gladstone's Cabinet. The Mayoress of St. Pancras had happened in unexpectedly that afternoon and the little party grouped itself around the fire in Charles Dickens' own room on the second-floor back. I remember the good lady, in her thought for the safety of the children a few days later, sent fire-guards for all the basket-grates in our house.

There was another lady whom the reader might have known, for she was the daughter, wife and

mother of the three dukes, although she was not herself a duchess. She came walking, because she loved to walk, and the children gathered around her enjoying the contact of their own sharp minds with her famous wit. And another and another—I might go on relating—all of whom furnished not entertainment only to the Somers Town children, but also a valuable stimulation.

There were men of note who called at the Johnson Street house, but in these days of ordinary clothes great men furnish little attraction to the observant imagination of children, an imagination which is so comparable with that of the public at large. Yet the most memorable visit, a visit that represented for us the black-smocked children who could not talk English, but who lived just across the Channel in the country where the Great War had been fought, was made by a distinguished gentleman in a "top-hat". The story of that visit has an international importance reaching far beyond Johnson Street, and is worthy of record.

A large envelope had arrived one day under the care of a French stamp, and inside was discovered a communication from Monsieur La Roche, then Minister of Foreign Affairs for the French Republic, as follows :

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître que j'apprécie hautement le caractère instructif de l'œuvre que vous m'avez signalée et que j'ai décidé de faire don à l'institution, "The Children's Libraries Movement," d'une collection d'ouvrages français pour la jeunesse, représentant une somme d'environ 2,000 francs.

This very promising letter was submitted to many interpretations by "la jeunesse" and myself, and finally, in answer to an inquiry, the Ambassador in London, Monsieur le Comte de Saint-Aulaire, wrote:

En réponse à votre lettre du 15 mars dernier, je suis heureux de vous faire savoir que le Ministère des Affaires Etrangères vient d'informer cette Ambassade que les livres qui vous ont été promis vous seront expédiés dans le courant de cette semaine par l'Agence Générale de Librairie de Paris. Je suis aussi chargé (the Ambassador continued) de vous exprimer toute la satisfaction qu'éprouve le Gouvernement de la République à collaborer ainsi à l'œuvre des bibliothèques enfantines que vous présidez et dont il apprécie pleinement l'intérêt."

All this meant that the people of France had become interested in our Library and thought enough of it to send us a wonderful collection of French children's books.

If the wreath of geraniums from America had been a puzzle, this generous present of goodness knows how many books sent a thrill of excitement through the readers that could not be stilled even after the books had arrived. Whatever they might look like, and however we were to read them, it was evident that they must not be merely allowed to walk in the back door, if that had been possible, and therefore we set about to welcome their arrival with all the festal display our community could muster. We borrowed from the shops, whose plate-glass windows line the main street of our borough, all the French and English flags that had been accumulated by them during the

period of the Anglo-French enthusiasm in the recent war. We counted them in dozens, from tiny fluttering things that followed each other like handkerchiefs along a clothes-line, to huge waving banners that actually extended from the back to the front of our Library, as we unfolded them. Some of the shop managers had become so keen that great sheets of bunting had been sewn together to form the "tricolour" especially for this occasion.

It was decided that the hanging of the colours up and down Johnson Street should be held on the night preceding the arrival of the Ambassador with his gift from the Republic, but we had failed in our plans to provide for the weather, and it rained. Perhaps the reader has climbed among the chimney-pots on the slanting roofs of the little tumble-down villas of an old slum at night, but if he has never enjoyed that experience in the rain, he may still have something of a novelty before him. There is a severe cornice that hides the irregularities of the roof tops from the observer passing through Johnson Street, but behind this cornice, from where a gutter generally allows the water to make its way more gently upon the inhabitants below than if it dropped directly from the heavens upon their heads, the tiles of the roof slant steeply up toward the centre of the house. To reach the height of the gable, which on this night was dividing the flood of rain as the Red Sea had been divided many years before, the long chimneys straggled up in the dim light. These

chimneys of Johnson Street presented the effect of groups of prehistoric creatures petrified and forgotten by the busy humans below. Their irregular shapes, resulting from a century's patching, and topped with all imaginable inventions for bettering the draught and preventing the inpour of rain, reminded one of an upright species of gargoyle which were doubtless wont to gather in solemn groups for gossip like penguins on a rocky cliff. On this night the strength of their patriotism was to be tested by having the flag ropes tied around their sooty bodies, for such was the length of our borrowed banners that no lower support would allow them to hang without impeding the occasional traffic below.

Night operations had been decided upon in order to secure the co-operation of labouring men who were not at home in the day time. Almost opposite there lived a coal vendor whose cart was often to be seen, like a doctor's car, waiting patiently in front of his door. His daughters had married other coal vendors, and altogether they occupied the entire house. These strong Englishmen, aided by the advice and enthusiasm of their wives, struggled until well past midnight with the wet flags and the slippery ropes. The children, to be sure, had helped to tie the flags to the ropes, but as bedtime drew near they were called away by anxious parents, mindful of school the next day, until there was not one remaining. The difficulties were innumerable. I remember myself attaching one end of a line that was being adjusted to the

roof across the street, to the caretaker's bed in our top-floor front, and then the distress and excitement when the weight of the drenched flags and the pulling of the men on the roofs opposite whom we found it difficult to make hear through the rain, began moving the bed and ourselves toward the open window. Nothing prevented us all being dragged into the street except the

The Two Front Windows between which Charles Dickens kept his own boy's books, showing the Residence of the Original of "Little Dorrit" across Johnson Street.

impossibility of the bed slipping through the window-frame.

Even when all the flags were waving in the glimmer of the street lamps, the excitement did not subside. It seems the good woman who lived at the top of the house directly over the way from us, the house where "Little Dorrit's" father had carried on his undertaking business, felt she had

been slighted by not having any flags suspended from her chimney. I had taken the trouble (no small trouble either, since this good widow was deaf and her many children were all dumb) to ask for permission to trespass on her tiles, but finding that the flues from her room ended in a perilous structure which overhung her apartment at such an angle that it seemed a greater marvel of masonry than the leaning tower of Pisa, I had feared the stability of this dejected relic of the builder's art. To the widow this meant nothing. The fact of the matter was that the flags, hung from the chimneys of the people next door, merely slapped at the soiled panes of her windows. She spent the evening sharpening her wits and dulling her senses at the tavern in the street, and returned to her brood of dumb children who were among our regular readers at the Library, after the last flag had been hung. Opening her window with all the defiance of Barbara Freitchie, she shrieked invectives forth into the quiet of the deserted street. Not so much the "retort courteous", as the "retort immediate" is the pride of the Cockney. A reply was received without delay.

The hue and cry following a public statement, whether the statement be made through a letter to *The Times* or through the broken pane of a window on the top floor of "Little Dorrit's" house in Johnson Street, the reply follows as naturally as a dog in the wake of a cat. In this particular case the deaf widow declared that she had heard that the woman's husband, whose

adjacent chimneys were draped with the standards of England and France, was receiving a pension for having been wounded in Gallipoli, when he had neither been wounded in Gallipoli nor in any other place where he could show a scar for it. The accused remained silent, as is always the etiquette in these cases, while his wife acted as defendant. She dismissed the case against her husband with a strong gesture of words and filed a complaint of her own against her neighbour's being drunk from morning to night eight days in the week. The witnesses in the case up and down the street raised their windows and then their voices. Some of the ladies made effective megaphones with the evening papers, thus doubling the publicity value of the Press. Long after the clock in the parish church at the other end of the lane known as "Little Hell" struck two, the voices died down from sheer exhaustion and left the soft patter of the rain and the occasional flapping of the flags to the quiet of the early morning.

The preparation for the visit from the Republic had meant more than decorating. For days the children had dispatched themselves throughout the various streets of St. Pancras with printed notices, which, when folded and inscribed "personal" with the further touch of turning down one corner, demanded attention even when slipped into the ever receptive letter-boxes in the front doors. There had also been posters announcing the "Official Visit of the French Ambassador" to be draped over packages of tea and dried prunes,

propped up against sample coffin cases or stuck to brilliant sweets behind the continuous glass windows that sought to distract the wayfarer bent on getting to or from his business. The very last effort of preparation was to clothe myself in "morning dress", tipped at head and foot with that peculiarly shiny variety of hat and boot. I remember one of the leading authorities on children's libraries in America arrived at 13 Johnson Street from Hartford, Connecticut, just before this last act. With true New England caution she had come early in order to miss nothing, and proposed to remain seated in the one large chair in our reading-room until something began. The first thing to begin, as I have stated, was the dressing of myself preparatory to receiving the Ambassador, and since this most distinguished lady was entrenched in front of the chest of drawers, which I had been forced to requisition for the storage of my clothes, there seemed a difficulty about the curtain's going up. The lady, however, allowed herself to be committed to the care of the children, who recognized at once the precious value of her character, and was guided to the Town Hall nearby.

Town halls are generally dismal places. Their dinginess satisfies the taxpayers that they may be getting something for nothing, after all. It appeases the unsuccessful candidates that they are at least spared the general monthly meeting in the drab surroundings which might have given them the title of Alderman or Councillor. The

St. Pancras Town Hall was so utterly depressing on the outside that on climbing to the Council Chamber one was rather elevated spiritually to discover so large and high-vaulted a room within. It had a raised platform at the far end and from the entrance, probably suggested by the rostrum whose foundations are still to be seen in the Forum at Rome. Over the balustrade of this platform we had draped flags lent to us by the French Society, but the long tables with their severe chairs, the great uncurtained windows and the generally dehumanized aspect of the typical public building was left as the Council was pleased to use it from month to month.

The interest of giving a party in somebody else's house is that you can never entirely be sure of what you will have to do from one moment to another. I had warned His Worship the Mayor and "his all-importance" the janitor, that the guests would arrive at a certain time. Since there was no change to make in the arrangement of the hall other than to give it the monthly dusting, which would have been done in all events preparatory to the Council Meeting that same evening, the janitor was prepared for anything, but the Mayor I found in his parlour, like the king in the "Four-and-Twenty Blackbirds", signing cheques. No one had dared to choose the Town Hall as a place for attracting a crowd, and His Worship had supposed that he would not be further troubled than to meet with four or five delegates for a matter of ten minutes. It was the Pathé picture

man who set matters stirring by making his way into the parlour and interrupting the operation of Government finances by a request that the dignitary of the borough come down to the front door and hold the French Ambassador in conversation on the pavement until he received a sign from the camera operator that the spectacle was satisfactorily recorded. In response the Mayor "called for his pipe and he called for his bowl", and donning his official chain of gold and enamel, proceeded with me to the front steps.

The Comte de Saint-Aulaire, who seemed unaware that London had many mayors, had been delayed through making a visit first to the Mansion House in the City, but when he had finally arrived and been delayed on the pavement, in spite of the shower which had seen its opportunity, the Mayor conducted him by means of a private passage-way to his parlour and thus directly into the hall. During this time I had hastened to gather the other speakers for the afternoon, who had become weary of lingering in one place. It was not until the Mayor had commenced his introductory speech that I entered the hall and realized that the line of distinguished ladies, who formed our committee and were therefore waiting to receive the Ambassador at the main entrance to the hall, had been completely circumvented by the Mayor in his haste.

The hall was packed, however, and the speeches arranged themselves with delightful variety. The Mayor spoke in welcome of the honour conferred on the borough by the French Ambassador's

official visit, and His Excellency the Ambassador replied expressing the interest of his people in children's libraries and in the author of the *Tale of Two Cities*, and made his formal presentation of the gift of French children's books to David Copperfield's Library. It was my privilege as President of the "Movement", which had as its aim the establishment of David Copperfield's Library, to thank the people of France, through their Ambassador, at the same time remarking upon the appropriateness of the French interest in a community that had been originally planned to receive refugees from the Commune. Alfred Noyes then delivered his poem on the boy Dickens' return to David Copperfield's Library, and Pett Ridge added several witty encounters with Somers Town children. The meeting concluded with the local undertaker reciting Bob Sawyer's party. There had been in attendance over a hundred librarians from different parts of England, and in reply to Miss Hewins' message from the libraries in America—for she had been given an honoured place in the list of speakers—the officers of the national library associations had spoken in commendation of the Library called David Copperfield's.

After offering tea to all of our guests at the close of the meeting, we guided them, by means of boys and girls stationed at the various corners around which the road turns during its short passage from the Town Hall, to Johnson Street. For my part I acted as courier to the Ambassador's

party, which had added Lady Dickens to its number—for the son of Charles Dickens had married a French woman of unusual charm. The French chauffeur, under my direction, took a circuitous route through La Place Clarendon, so that when he finally reached La Rue Johnson, the crowd lined the street and the flags waved and fluttered in a canopy over their heads. Thus the French Ambassador to the Court of St. James proceeded in state to the humble door of the dream boy, "David Copperfield". The windows on either side of the street had been rented to outsiders, who had always been under the impression that the neighbouring streets in which they themselves lived were superior to the long-forgotten Alderman Johnson's Street, and whatever old flags or rags of colour it was possible to discover about the cluttered rooms, or to borrow from the similar rooms of neighbours, were now hung with bravado over the yellow stucco fronts of the houses. Even the roofs, which were so familiar to me after the preceding night, formed a promenade for the great occasion.

There was much cheering as His Excellency descended from his car and once again was waylaid by camera men, one of whom, in suggesting the sort of pose that would be looked for by readers of his paper, said: "Would Your Excellency mind looking up as though you were interested in the building"! To all this the tall, military figure of the Comte and his keen, intellectual face lent themselves. The crowd was

forcibly pulled and pushed aside and in an instant the picture was taken.

The house itself was "all beautiful within". On the little tables in all the rooms were spread the glorious gift of French children's books, which had been carefully selected by the National Library in Paris. The Ambassador explained that they had chosen profusely illustrated volumes so that the strange language might be helped in its translation by the fascinating pictures. There were, however, many French children in Somers Town who were delighted with these books, the like of which they had never imagined. Florrie Adams, who will long be remembered as the "Warder of the Fairy Dungeon", had never been feazed by anything in Johnson Street, and she had taken every precaution to be fully prepared to meet the traditional "French Invader". She had, from the day we learned of the Ambassador's visit, scoured the town for such French words and phrases as the English Tommies delighted to bring home from their adventure across the Channel. The foreign language was not only "cockneyized", but even its meaning was given a different and original turn for the better or the worse, so that when enough of it was accumulated to make a conversation suitable for the Warder of the Fairy Dungeon to address to the Emissary of a French Republic, it was arresting, to say the least!

Hundreds of visitors seemed to come and go during the course of the afternoon. Everybody expressed great delight with the superb gift of

France and the many other books from other parts of the world. I remember the Ambassador noting a picture of the heir to the throne in my upstairs room and saying that he liked the spirit with which the Prince of Wales had fought in France; it was so much more helpful than the spirit shown by the only other Prince of Wales who had fought in their country. His Excellency and the Mayor, who was acting as guide, made such ado about my eating and sleeping and having my being generally in so small a room, that they seemed to forget for the moment that Charles Dickens had lived in the "small chamber" to far better effect than it was my privilege. Other people seemed to pause in wonderment in the tiny apartment, so that when Lady Dickens had mounted the stairs it was almost impossible to crowd her through the door that had opened out so often for her distinguished father-in-law. Even Alfred Noyes found difficulty as he climbed "to a little room and entered", but he saw enough to reassure himself that his pen was true to the spirit of the house.

The Ambassador's limousine rolled out of Johnson Street, as did many other cars that had been waiting for their interested owners, the crowd of strangers dispersed and even the inhabitants of the street went in to prepare their tea. The gay fronts of the humble dwellings up and down the street, whose window-sills had been ornamented in a traditional way of having a miniature picket fence on the sill, divided in the middle by a tiny

gate and overhung with the blossoms of a window-box behind, seemed to rejoice in silence over the honour which had been bestowed upon the house that had stood for a century unnoticed in their midst.

CHAPTER XII

THE LORD MAYOR COMMITS THE LIBRARY TO THE KEEPING OF ST. PANCRAS BOROUGH

SHORTLY after the French Ambassador had brought the royal gift of children's books to the little house in Johnson Street, the borough of St. Pancras felt called upon to co-operate with us in assuring the permanency of an object that had received so general an interest at home and abroad. We ourselves began to realize that the home of Charles Dickens' boyhood was so near to the hearts of the people, rich and poor throughout the land, that it really belonged to the people and should not be left to the chance of private possession. Much as the owner of some rare manuscript or some great masterpiece might feel bound to relinquish his rights in favour of the British Museum or the National Gallery, we decided to entrust the Library, which had been such a light and happy burden, to the care of the people of London whom Charles Dickens loved and served to such advantage. Accordingly we offered the house and its two neighbouring houses to the Government. My own health had been giving way under the strain of the additional responsi-

bility of the Library, but I remained at No. 13 Johnson Street until the final action was taken by the Borough Council in their June (1922) meeting, and then departed at once for the Villa Razzolini, where the greater part of this manuscript was written in a belvedere overlooking Florence. It was here that the following letter from the Mayor reached me :

DEAR MR. BRETT LANGSTAFF,

I was very pleased to have your letter from Florence and sincerely trust that your health is profiting by your stay there. I appreciate very much your kind expression of thanks, although our heartiest thanks are due you for all you have done on behalf of the Library movement in St. Pancras.

At the meeting of the Council on the 28th June, your offer to present to the borough the Children's Library in the house of Charles Dickens' boyhood at 13 Johnson Street exempt from all encumbrance such as leases, mortgages, etc., the contents, books, furniture, pictures, etc., therein, was accepted, the Council agreeing that the building should be preserved as a permanent memorial to Charles Dickens in such a way as to afford the children of St. Pancras a place for reading under the most approved conditions possible.

The Council also accepted the offer of Councillor Abraham Davis to present the freehold of 13 Johnson Street and that of the two adjoining houses for the purposes of the scheme, and the Council tender to you and Councillor Davis their best thanks.

Our Council's solicitors have been instructed to take all necessary steps to complete the agreement, and to that end they are in communication with your solicitors, who I expect have your address and instructions from you, authorizing them to complete. If not, perhaps you will drop them a line.

With regard to the meeting at the Mansion House on the 1st November, at 3 p.m., I shall be very pleased indeed to be present.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

T. H. MCCORMACK,

Mayor of St. Pancras.

The Mansion House, to which the Mayor refers in his letter, was to be the last spectacular scene of our effort to establish "David Copperfield's Library". On the top of one of the 500 buses that pass every hour in front of this noble building, it is to be supposed that the reader has, at some time in his life, ridden. The triangular space enclosed by the Mansion House and the Bank of England, with the Exchange facing them, which the pedestrian finds it safest to cross by means of the many undermining tunnels, is so well known that there has been no necessity of giving it a name. The space has seemed peculiarly intimate to me ever since the night I dined in the Bank with the officer whose duty it was to guard the 54 million pounds' worth of gold coin and bullion reserve from sunset to sunrise. The blind windows of the Bank, arranged for safety, but perhaps typifying "Justice", seem to gaze listlessly over the tumult to the Corinthian porticos of the Exchange and of the Mansion House.

As for the Mansion House itself, the imposing Renaissance edifice erected by George Dance the Elder in 1739–53, like the Doge's Palace at Venice, combines the function of palace, court of justice and prison. This multiple quality of the residence of the dignitary who presides over the City of London must not be thought to provide for the varying moods of the Lord Mayor, but rather for His Lordship's convenience. Within the palace the chief feature is a spacious room

measuring 60 by 90 feet, with a lofty barrel ceiling supported by two rows of columns running the length of the apartment. There were certain architectural features borrowed from the Hall of Vitruvius which brought with them the term "Egyptian", and although it would seem a strange place to any Egyptians we know of, these columns, together with a rich mystic light that steals through the stained glass of the windows, create the atmosphere of Aida and make us content that it should be called the Egyptian Hall. Further, there is the assurance of a priceless collection of silver, added to by each succeeding mayor, and a remembrance of the famous green turtle soup which has flown for ages from the vaults below, for it is in this hall that the balls and banquets are held to display the opulence of the City.

On November 1st, when the Mayor of St. Pancras appeared in order to fulfil the promise of his letter, he found a large gathering of notable guests assembled in the Venetian Parlour with the members of our committee. At the time appointed, these guests passed through the *salon*, adorned with its rare tapestries and sculpture, into the State drawing-rooms. They paused here for a moment until an official, bearing his wand of office, opened the doors and announced in commanding tones: "Make way for the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress". This having been made, the host of the afternoon, wearing his chain of office and accompanied by his wife, passed through the

crowd and took their position at the door opening into a second drawing-room.

It then fell upon me to introduce the guests to His Lordship. I felt much as some intriguing cardinal of old presenting foreign delegates to a king. The Lord Mayor was continuously "delighted", and said as much as he shook each of his guests by the hand and passed them on to his spouse. There were the Japanese Ambassador, the Latvian Minister, and representatives from the American and other Embassies in London. The chiefest of our guests came from Holland, a special delegation that had made the journey for no other reason than to bring us the children's books of Holland. Jhr de Gijselaar, the Burgomaster of Leyden, headed the delegation as representing the university of that ancient city, and with him came representatives from the Hague and other Dutch cities. John Galsworthy was there as the representative of our native backers in the world of letters, and he also had made a point of returning in time from a visit to Holland. The head of the School of Librarianship of the University of London represented the profession in England, and Miss A. C. Moore, the supervisor of 43 children's libraries in New York City, represented for us the professional interest that had been shown on the other side of the ocean. The son of Charles Dickens was unable at the last moment to come himself, but he sent his wife, Lady Dickens, and a speech to be read. There were letters and cables from all over the world bearing messages of encouragement and congratulation.

When the reception of special guests had been completed, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress preceded them into the Egyptian Hall, which was filled by this time with the expectant crowd. At the long table His Excellency from Japan sat on His Lordship's right, John Galsworthy sat on his left, i.e. on the left of his "better half", and I sat behind His Lordship's ear. The more distinguished of us spoke, the rest of us listened, and finally I was given the opportunity of publicly handing over the responsibility of the precious Library, which the borough had some months before agreed to accept. There was a cable from Kate Douglas Wiggin, sending ten pounds, and others from abroad, as well as many letters, two of which I quote below. The first was from the freeholder, not only of Johnson Street, but of so much other land in the borough that no single voice could carry more weight in determining the future of the deplorable neighbourhood surrounding the Dickens House:

DEAR MR. LANGSTAFF,

I shall do my very best to be with you to-morrow, but owing to the Municipal Election Day and another important appointment I fear that, much as I should like to be present, I may not be able to do so.

Would you please convey to the ladies and gentlemen present the gratification I feel in making the presentation of the house in which Charles Dickens spent his childhood, especially as it will be used for such a beneficial and laudable purpose.

The solicitors have had instructions for the conveyance of the freehold not alone of No. 13, in which the great Dickens resided, but also the adjoining two houses—Nos. 11 and 12—in the hope that this gift will be the mainspring of important

The Child who, having read every volume in David Copperfield's Library, asks for more.

developments in that district; and I feel sure such developments will greatly tend to the elevation of the entire neighbourhood.

With kind regards,
I remain,
Yours sincerely,
ABRAHAM DAVIS.

The second of the letters comes from the gracious Queen, whose patronage and personal interest counted so much in our public productions on behalf of the Library and fits with treasured appropriateness as the last word in our story.

SANDRINGHAM, NORFOLK,
19th *October*, 1922.

DEAR SIR,

Queen Alexandra desires me to thank you for your letter of the 16th instant and to express to you Her Majesty's regret that she will be unable to be present at the meeting which is to be held at the Mansion House on November 1st, in connection with the David Copperfield's Library.

Her Majesty wishes me to assure you of her sincere interest in the Children's Libraries Movement, in the aims and objects of which she greatly sympathizes, and Her Majesty is glad to know that this worthy Memorial to Charles Dickens will be permanently preserved by the borough of St. Pancras.

Queen Alexandra cordially congratulates you upon the success which has attended your efforts in promoting this good cause.

I remain, dear Sir,
Yours faithfully,
HENRY STREATFIELD, COLONEL,
Private Secretary to H.M.
Queen Alexandra.

The Rev. J. BRETT LANGSTAFF,
13 Johnson Street, N.W.1.

When the letters had been read, due appreciation was expressed to everybody and in particular

to our host, the Lord Mayor, who said that of all meetings that had been held in the Egyptian Hall during his administration, this had been unique in its commanding interest. On behalf of our committee I gave into the hands of the Lord Mayor of London such papers and documents as were deemed necessary to secure faith on our part for the conveyance of David Copperfield's Library, and he, in turn, handed them to His Worship the Mayor of St. Pancras, wearing the official insignia of his office, who accepted them as signifying the trust undertaken by his borough, before a host of distinguished witnesses, in the name of Almighty God to preserve the historic residence at 13 Johnson Street, together with its valuable collection of books and pictures for the use of the children and to the memory of Charles Dickens.

EPILOGUE

BY

ALFRED NOYES

A hundred years ago, there was a garret
  At the top of a small dark house,—
A glory-hole for dusty books and boxes,
  A haunt of the spider and the mouse.

But he crept to it, when no one else was looking,
  Like a lonely little thief in the night;
And his name—it might be Copperfield or Dickens;
  But he stood there, in a ring of candle-light.

And his elders thought that attics led to nowhere;
  He felt that they very seldom knew;
And, somewhere in the dark, there must be doorways
  That a boy might scramble through;

And a treasure that was hidden very deeply
  From the day where the good dreams died.
His elders had not found it. Was it buried
  In the things they had thrown aside?

There were worlds in the balance, as he doubted,—
  Was there anything to see? Should he go?
Then he saw it—at his feet—a book of magic,
  And the wizard name, Defoe.

And he sat him down among the tattered volumes ;
  And, with one foot under him curled,
His dark eyes blazed above the pages,
  And he woke,—in that great new world.

That night was grim, and dark, and growing darker.
  He sat there, stiller than a stone—
A small boy, reading in a garret.
  A great king, seated on a throne.

* * * * *

Was he lonely in the Abbey where they laid him
  When the dreams had all come true ?
Did he wish to hunt again for hidden treasure
  In the house that his childhood knew ?

For he stole like a shadow up the dark street ;
  And there—through a window—he could see
Not a room, but a harbour, bright with lanthorns,
  And tall ships casting from the quay.

To every ship a watchman in the crow's nest,
  With one foot under him curled ;
And a crew of urchins crowding on the canvas
  For adventure to the ends of the world.

There were skippers like the hawk-eyed Cooper,
  And the Mississippi king, Mark Twain ;
And a lean Samoan Scot, named Robert Louis,
  Full-sail to the South again.

And Defoe, still dreaming of his island
  With that strangely single footprint in the sand ;
There were smoke-stacks roaring down to Rio ;
  And wings—for the Never-never land.

And the shadow at the window stood and wondered,
"O, who can the harbour-master be?
For his pilot lights are shining on the waters
As they never shone for me."

Then he saw—a crooked stair behind the harbour;
And he stole through the open door;
He climbed to a little room and entered
Like a thief, in the night, once more.

It was narrow as his house in the Abbey.
It was dim with smiles and tears;
And he groped for the master of the dream-ships
Through the mists of a hundred years.

He groped there, silent as a shadow;
For he saw him, stiller than a stone,
A small boy, reading in a garret,
A great king, seated on a throne.

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